

KILLING THE GOLDEN GOOSE:  
BALANCING PRESERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT  
IN WILMINGTON, NORTH CAROLINA

Sharad J. Shah

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Approved by

Advisory Committee

\_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Tammy S. Gordon

\_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Chris E. Fonvielle, Jr.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. William D. Moore  
Chair

Accepted by

\_\_\_\_\_  
Dean, Graduate School

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## ABSTRACT

There is a delicate balance between preserving objects of the past and preparing for the future. While preservationists fight a noble battle in protecting artifacts and architecture which may possess historic significance, their endeavors impede the efforts of developers in reshaping the landscape. The story of downtown Wilmington's revitalization process is a story of a city's changing needs, and how one organization in particular, Downtown Area Revitalization Effort, Inc., worked to remedy the city's ills.

Established in response to urban sprawl and the impending construction of an indoor shopping mall, DARE initially used preservation as a tool for economic development, but with the passage of time and changes in administration, rehabilitation was replaced by marketing and development policies. However, such occurrences were not isolated to Wilmington. The pressure to cast aside preservation in favor of renewed expansion registered in downtown areas across the country. Though organizations in cities like Charleston and Savannah were successful in preserving their historic fabric through the practice of urban husbandry, other cities such as Chattanooga and Mobile eventually succumbed to increased development through long-term project planning.

By examining the economic history of downtown Wilmington in relation to urban sprawl, this thesis argues that changes in the city's political climate brought about a shift in DARE's policies, as the organization moved from practical preservation to industrial recruiting and development.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

History is but a sequence of incidents tied together and it is the historian's task to find the common link between events. This thesis is the result of the actions and inactions of many people, and that being said, there are numerous people I wish to thank and only a finite space with which to do it.

First off, I wish to thank my parents, Jagdish and Karen Shah, for both their financial and emotional support. Without them, I doubt I would have finished graduate school. Furthermore, I must acknowledge and thank my brother, Raj, whose decision to return to graduate school inspired me to go back and pursue an MA in history.

I also wish to thank Drs. William McCarthy and Robert Toplin, two of my favorite professors as an undergraduate at the University of North Carolina at Wilmington. The courses I took with them and other members of the history department inspired me to stay close to home as I considered potential graduate schools. Their letters of recommendation came in handy when I applied to UNCW. Special thanks to Dr. Michael Seidman, who helped me make the decision to specialize in Public History because "it was the pragmatic thing to do."

I would like to extend my thanks to the members of my thesis committee: Drs. Chris Fonvielle, Tammy S. Gordon, and William Moore. Dr. Fonvielle's knowledge of local history was insightful, and the conversations in his office proved enlightening and entertaining. Likewise, Dr. Gordon's enthusiasm for Public History (and museum studies in particular) often proved contagious. It was Dr. Gordon's suggestion about possible opportunities at the New Hanover Public Library which led me to an internship with Beverly Tetterton on the DARE archives and this thesis. Dr. William Moore not only served as the chair for my thesis committee, but also supervised my internship at the library. As a result, he has witnessed the fruit of my

labors and played a vital role in both my internship and thesis. None of this would be possible without him.

Likewise, Beverly Tetterton and Joe Sheppard at the New Hanover County Public Library watched as I archived files, performed research, and worked on my thesis over the span of almost one-and-a-half years. I cannot express enough thanks for their assistance with research, identifying points of interest, establishing connections and buying me lunches.

Speaking of finances, I want to extend a sincere “thank you” Deans Robert Roer and Karen Sandell of UNCW’s Graduate School and Drs. Susan McCaffray and David La Vere of the history department for providing me with the grants and fellowships needed to carry out my studies.

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Furthermore, I also want to thank the present and past officers of DARE and Wilmington Downtown, Inc., including Gene Merritt, Mary Gornto, Bob Murphrey, Susi Hamilton, and John Hinnant. Whether through e-mails, interviews, or the donation of the DARE files to the New Hanover County Public Library, none of this would be possible without your contributions.

Finally, I wish to thank all my friends and relatives who have been patient, understanding, and supportive of me though this endeavor over the past three years. There are too many of you to list, but you know who you are.

## DEDICATION

This is for Mom, Dad, and BT. Your support and guidance through this made it possible.

It wasn't the finish line: it was what I learned along the way.

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

*The reasonable man adapts himself to the world: the unreasonable one persists in trying to adapt the world to himself. Therefore all progress depends on the unreasonable man.*

George Bernard Shaw

On January 28, 2004, Wilmington, North Carolina's Downtown Area Revitalization Effort (DARE, Inc.) changed its name to Wilmington Downtown, Inc., and by doing so, completed a shift away from the organization's founding philosophy. Similar to other public-private organizations which specialized in the financial recovery of downtown areas, DARE utilized historic preservation as a tool for economic stimulation. By the mid-1980s, power transfers in both DARE's governing body and Wilmington's political leadership led DARE's board of directors to believe historic preservation hindered economic opportunities in downtown Wilmington. Furthermore, as the value of real estate in downtown Wilmington increased, and as conflicts emerged among developers, preservationists, and local politicians, members of DARE frequently found themselves entangled in disputes which ultimately hindered the organization's ability to operate to its fullest potential.<sup>1</sup>

Established in 1977 by Wilmington's City Council and its mayor, Ben Halterman, DARE was an organized response to the inner-city decay brought on by urban sprawl, urban renewal, and the impending construction of a new indoor shopping mall which threatened the economic survival of downtown Wilmington's Central Business District. (See figure 1) As defined by the National Trust for Historic Preservation's president, Richard Moe, urban sprawl is "urbanization

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<sup>1</sup> Downtown Wilmington, Inc., "History," <http://www.wilmingtondowntown.com/history.html> (accessed May 20, 2008); Bonnie Eksten "Downtown Group, DARE, Changes Name," *Star News*, 29 January 2004, 1B.

that creeps unchecked across the landscape, siphoning the life out of historic centers while turning the countryside into clutter.”<sup>2</sup>

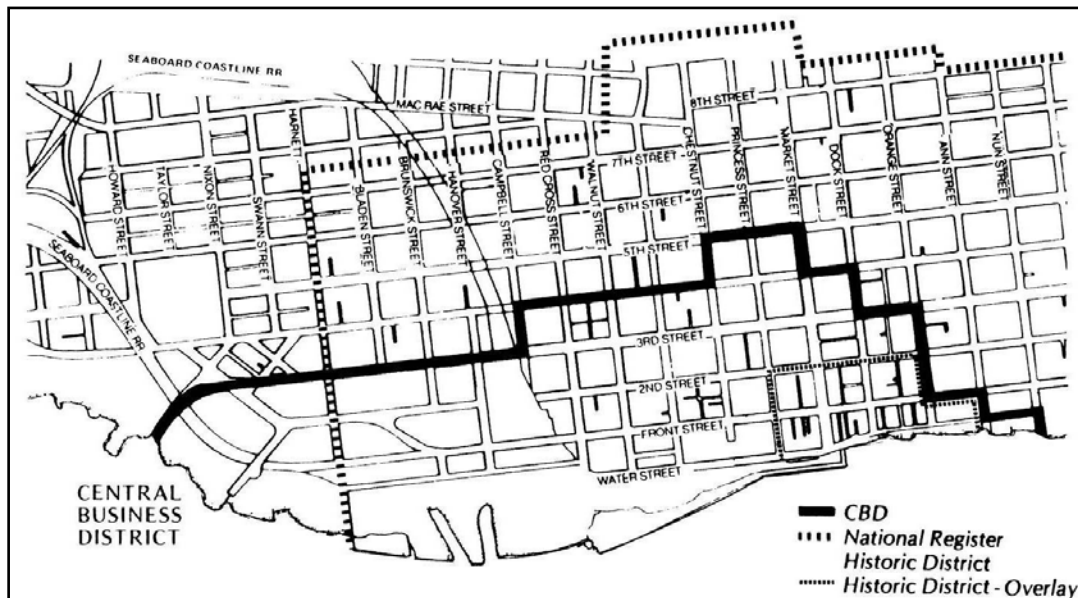


Figure 1. Map of downtown Wilmington’s Central Business District c. 1987. (DARE, Inc. Collection, North Carolina Room, New Hanover County Public Library, Wilmington, N.C.)

For DARE, solving urban sprawl required an evaluation of downtown Wilmington’s ailments, taking corrective measures to repair the city’s tarnished image, and enhancing the city’s aesthetic features to improve its marketability. When the agency began operations in 1977, residential vacancy in buildings located in the CBD hovered around 50 percent due to suburban sprawl, precipitating a decline in the city’s tax base. In addition to its decreasing tax base, downtown Wilmington also experienced rising unemployment as merchants continued their exodus to the suburbs. DARE’s mission was to “facilitate and coordinate activities which will enhance the quality of life for people who live, work, play, and visit in Wilmington’s historic

<sup>2</sup> Richard Moe and Carter Wilkie, *Changing Places: Rebuilding Community in the Age of Sprawl* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1997), 245.

central river area.”<sup>3</sup> If DARE was to fulfill its mission, it needed the cooperation of preservationists, developers, and local politicians.<sup>4</sup>

In *Giving Preservation a History* editors Max Page and Randall Mason examine the complex relationship between preservationists and developers—a relationship which involves compromises on both parts for the sake of both preserving elements of a building and ensuring that a property becomes a profitable investment. As Page and Mason suggest, “Developers seek private gain; preservationists are interested in the public good.”<sup>5</sup> Compromises between the two parties provide some assurance that a building or structure of historical significance will not be entirely destroyed—at the loss of some of its original integrity. Further complicating the relationship between preservationists and developers is the inclusion of local politicians. While publicly-elected officials have the power to pass regulations which favor either preservationists or developers, politicians must also consider the opinions of their constituents. This pressing need to appease multiple parties often leads to indecision and inaction. In the case of DARE and revitalization in downtown Wilmington, all of these complications were present, and while there was initially a cohesive balance, the push for development became increasingly evident.

By the mid-1980s, the shift in DARE’s mission sparked a negative reaction from ardent preservationists and local residents concerned about the direction in which DARE was heading. As the agency completed many of its original objectives, board members devised broader and bolder goals for DARE to accomplish. By deviating from its original policy and venturing down

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<sup>3</sup> *DARE Board Members Handbook, 1993-1994* (Wilmington, NC: DARE, Inc., 1994), 2, file DARE Board Member’s Handbook, DARE, Inc. Collection, North Carolina Room, New Hanover County Public Library (hereafter cited as DIC)

<sup>4</sup> Deborah Kelly, “DARE Stemmed City’s Decay,” *Star News*, 28 June 1982, 1B, file DARE, Inc.-1989, Local History Collection, North Carolina Room, New Hanover County Public Library (hereafter cited as LHC).

<sup>5</sup> Max Page and Randall Mason, “Rethinking the Roots of the Historic Preservation Movement,” In *Giving Preservation a History: Histories of Historic Preservation in the United States*, eds. Max Page and Randall Mason (New York, Routledge, 2004), 14.

a new path, DARE faced a series of setbacks as the organization encountered resistance from a community which once supported its agendas.

An author, lecturer, activist and New York City Landmarks Commissioner, Roberta Brandes Gratz discusses two opposing schools of thought related to downtown change in her books, *The Living City* and *Cities Back from the Edge: New Life for Downtown*.<sup>6</sup> On one side of the coin is *urban husbandry*, which as defined in *The Living City*, is the “care, management or conservation of the built environment.”<sup>7</sup> The built environment which Gratz refers to is any man-made landscape which “stretches from the individual streets within a city to the highway between cities.”<sup>8</sup> Conversely, there is project planning—a practice which Gratz associates with urban renewal and the destruction of the existing landscape through sweeping changes and little thought to alternatives or the use of historic preservation.<sup>9</sup>

This thesis will argue that through a mixture of internal and external influences, DARE shifted from the practice of urban husbandry and actively promoting historic preservation as an economic tool to the policy of project planning and embracing development. By focusing primarily on the years between 1976 and 2004, this thesis will provide a history of the origins of DARE and gradual changes which occurred in the agency in correlation to changes in the economic and political climate of downtown Wilmington. However, to fully appreciate and understand the significance of DARE, it is necessary to understand the economic history of downtown Wilmington and place this history into context with urban sprawl, urban renewal, and the preservation movement during the twentieth century.

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<sup>6</sup> Center for the Living City, “Welcome,” <http://centerforthelivingcity.org/who-are-we> (accessed November 2, 2008).

<sup>7</sup> Robert Brandes Gratz, *The Living City* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989), 34-35.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>9</sup> Roberta Brandes Gratz and Norman Mintz, *Cities Back from the Edge: New Life for Downtown* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1998), 59.

The second chapter of this thesis examines the origins of urban sprawl on both the national level and within the city of Wilmington. Through the works of scholars such as Sam Bass Warner, Jr., Delores Hayden, and Kenneth Jackson, the first chapter follows the early roots of suburbanization, beginning with the rise of streetcars and expanding with the growing use of automobiles following World War II. Connecting events occurring on the national level with those in Wilmington, works by historians such as Jane Jacobs, Beverly Tetterton and Tony Wrenn provide insight into the impact of sprawl on North Carolina's Port City. The second chapter also examines urban renewal and the ensuing preservation movement of the 1960s, and how these landmark events left a lasting impact on the landscape of the United States. The series of housing acts which led to urban renewal, accompanied with the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956, incited protests from preservationists who were concerned with the threat such massive development posed to unprotected historic landmarks across the United States. The response to the ransacking of America's cities ultimately led to the Historic Preservation Act of 1966, which established, among other things, limited protection for structures and districts of historic significance.

Historic districts in cities such as Charleston, South Carolina and Wilmington predate the Preservation Act, but organizations such as the Historic Wilmington Foundation (HWF) and Historic Charleston Foundation (HCF) gained strength under the protection of federal legislation. The successful efforts of the HWF's members in renovating properties and making buildings available for adaptive use (particularly the Cotton Exchange and Chandler's Wharf) would prove influential for DARE's organizers.

The third chapter of this thesis will provide an analysis of several model cities and organizations which influenced DARE's board of directors and provided the agency with a sense

of direction. Among the cities and organizations which inspired DARE's early efforts were Charleston, Savannah, Denver, and the National Trust for Historic Preservation's Main Street Program. As DARE's mission altered in accordance with downtown Wilmington's changing demands, the organization drew upon cities such as Chattanooga and Mobile as new models for change. By analyzing DARE and downtown Wilmington and juxtaposing the agency and city with organizations operating in similar cities, this thesis will provide insight into the qualities which are necessary for promoting a program containing an ideal balance between historic preservation and economic development. Furthermore, this thesis will examine how changes in the political climate in Wilmington and in DARE's leadership ultimately played a role in altering the course of DARE's mission.

Beginning with the fourth chapter, this thesis examines how DARE utilized adaptive use techniques originally developed by members of the HWF to save the city from growing competition emerging in the suburbs—specifically the creation of Independence Mall. While cleaning up Wilmington's CBD, executive directors Gene Merritt and Mary M. Gornto also recruited businesses and property owners who were willing to rehabilitate historic buildings in downtown Wilmington. By protecting, rehabilitating, and making the manmade landscape adaptable for new use, executive directors Merritt and Gornto followed closely in the footsteps of Lee Adler of Savannah and Thomas Wright of the HWF.

Chapter five explores the transformation which began following Gornto's departure from DARE in 1984, as the agency ventured in a different direction, placing more emphasis on recruiting and marketing. Once the agency's board of directors determined DARE had fulfilled most of its original goals, they decided to send the organization down a new path. While the renovation and preservation of buildings would still play a role in DARE's mission, such

practices would gradually decline as executive directors Robert Murphrey and Susi Hamilton worked on large projects aimed at improving and developing portions of the CBD in order to increase the city's appeal to businesses and visitors.

The sixth chapter and conclusion will provide an analysis of the leadership of DARE and the organization's policy shifts and the community's reaction. Furthermore, the conclusion provides an analysis of the role of the organization in comparison with the nature both of historic preservation and economic development.

Ultimately, the goal of this thesis is to present an understanding of how Wilmington, in relation to other downtown areas across the United States, survived and adapted to the development of new technology, passage of landmark laws, and, amidst the struggle to maintain a harmonious balance between preserving historically significant structures and promoting economic stability, switched from the practice of urban husbandry to project planning.

## CHAPTER TWO: URBAN SPRAWL TO THE PRESERVATION MOVEMENT

The late nineteenth century brought about change in the American landscape, establishing a new link between the rural and urban environments. Propelled by new innovations in transportation, the distance one could travel increased with respect to time. Thus, Americans gained a sense of freedom, and were no longer confined to the cityscape. As the public's gradual exodus to suburbia began, merchants made the inevitable trek to maintain their consumer base. In the aftermath of World War II and the post-war boom, the rapid rise and decline of downtown areas across the United States left cities like Wilmington, North Carolina searching for ways to rehabilitate deteriorating architecture and revive their stagnant economies.

Before exploring the revitalization process, it is vital to understand the history of urban sprawl and the factors which led to the growth of suburbia. Furthermore, an examination of Wilmington's economic history in the twentieth century prior to the rise of shopping malls will provide an understanding of the city's key sources of revenue and employment. Only after observing the events which transpired before the founding of Downtown Area Revitalization Effort, Inc. is it possible to fully understand why the establishment of DARE and organizations similar to it were necessary to preserve and develop Main Street America.

### **Streetcars and Suburbs**

Much of urban sprawl originates with the development of the electric streetcar. As part of what John R. Stilgoe describes as a "metropolitan corridor," streetcars and trains not only provided an efficient means of transportation within cities, but they also served as a connection which overlapped the urban, suburban, and rural landscapes. By fostering this link, streetcars in



particular fueled the development of real estate along railroad tracks both in terms of residential and commercial construction. (See figure 2) <sup>10</sup>



Figure 2. A streetcar passing down North Front Street in the early 1900s. (Courtesy of the New Hanover Public Library, Wilmington, N.C.)

In a case study of Boston, Sam Bass Warner, Jr. addresses the impact of streetcars on suburbanization. In *Streetcar Suburbs: The Process of Growth in Boston*, Warner examines how streetcars served not only as a means of transportation, but also as a method by which upwardly mobile Bostonians could escape from their claustrophobic surroundings and transplant themselves further outside the city. If living in the city was no longer necessary, open space welcomed those who could afford to build out in the country. However, so long as transportation remained confined to tracks, there was still a fixed radius in which early suburbanites could travel. Additionally, Warner demonstrates how class divisions played a role in suburbanization. Setting off a trend, wealthy Bostonians were the first to move out to the suburbs, followed by the upper middle class, and then the lower middle class. Making up between 20 to 30 percent of

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<sup>10</sup> John R. Stilgoe, *The Metropolitan Corridor: Railroads and the American Scene* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), x.

Boston's population, the lower middle class, once relocated, moved into densely-packed homes on small lots, which ensured that the rural landscape was lost. As Warner suggests, "The growth of the transportation system influenced not only the kind of houses built, but also their placement."<sup>11</sup>

Tied to the streetcar's role in the growth of suburbia was the public perception that the city possessed both a corrupt and crowded environment. In contrast, the appeal of suburbia drew from the myths connecting the grass-roots democracy of Jefferson to the agrarian landscape. For many, small-town living seemed virtuous. Additionally, housing in the suburbs provided middle class Americans with a "safe, sanitary environment" and "new houses in styles somewhat in keeping with their conception of family life."<sup>12</sup> Though escaping the city's high tax rates certainly provided ample incentive for moving out into the country, the promise of homeownership also appealed to many potential suburbanites.<sup>13</sup>

Streetcars played an influential role in the early history of Wilmington as well. According to local history librarian and historian, Beverly Tetterton, "streetcars were the heart and soul of city living."<sup>14</sup> Chartered in 1887, the Wilmington Railway Company ran the first the city's electric streetcar system and continued operations until 1939. Similar to Boston, the increase in streetcar tracks and streetcar usage, accompanied with the decline of horse-pulled cars, led to suburbanization in Wilmington. Two developments which appeared as a result of the suburbanization in Wilmington were Carolina Heights and Carolina Place. (See figure 3)

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<sup>11</sup> Sam Bass Warner, Jr., *Streetcar Suburbs: The Process of Growth in Boston, 1870-1900* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962), 55-60.

<sup>12</sup> Christopher Tunnard and Boris Pushkarev, *Man-Made America: Chaos or Control?* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), 19.

<sup>13</sup> Delores Hayden, *Building Suburbia: Green Fields and Urban Growth, 1820-2000* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2003), 88-91; Warner, *Streetcar Suburbs*, 157.

<sup>14</sup> Beverly Tetterton, *Wilmington: Lost But Not Forgotten* (Wilmington, N.C.: Dram Tree Books, JKF Publications, 2005), 14-15.

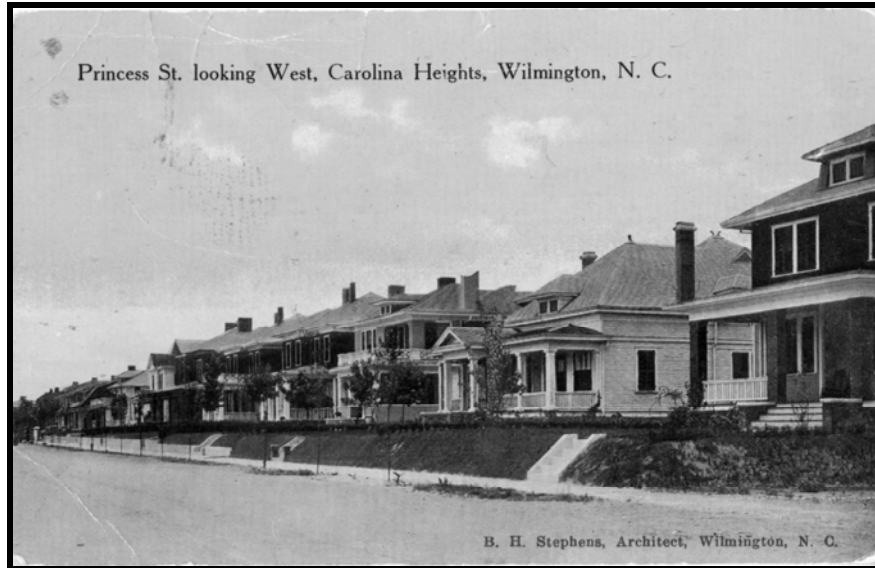


Figure 3. A streetcar suburb, the development of Carolina Heights epitomized early 20<sup>th</sup> century suburban development. (Courtesy of the New Hanover County Public Library, Wilmington, N.C.)

Built by the DeRosset Development Company, American Suburban Corporation, and Mary Bridgers (who was the daughter of Wilmington and Weldon Railroad executive Rufus Bridgers), these neighborhoods allowed for suburban living and urban downtown employment and shopping. The creation of the neighborhoods also exemplified divisions between race and class, as houses in Carolina Place cost a minimum of \$1500 and prohibited the selling of liquor or property to blacks. Meanwhile, properties in Bridgers' Carolina Heights sold for a minimum of \$4500. While the development of black subdivisions like Oak Side Park, David Bryant's Heights, and Crescent Heights provided more examples of the growth of suburbia, they also exemplified the segregation laws which existed at the time. However, as residential living in the suburbs increased, mixed-use housing in downtown Wilmington decreased. With the merchants and employees no longer living over the businesses which they operated, stores were unprotected

and many of the buildings in downtown Wilmington faced security issues or fell into disrepair due to this lack of oversight.<sup>15</sup>

Yet, as the streetcar contributed to suburban growth, it also connected remote locations to large cities. In addition to providing service to the developing suburbs, the Tide Water Power Company operated lines which ran from downtown Wilmington to distant locations such as Wrightsville Beach, thus allowing Wilmington to capitalize on its reputation as a resort town. According to a report published by the Chamber of Commerce in 1912, “As a summer resort and place of residence, Wilmington may lay claim to be unequaled in the South.”<sup>16</sup> While Wrightsville Beach is situated on a barrier island nine miles from the city, it was “connected by an unrivaled system of fast electric trolley trains.”<sup>17</sup> Of the lines running in and around Wilmington, the most popular was the Beach Line. (See figure 4) Ending its run in 1940, the Beach Line ceased operation due to the increasing competition from public bus services and the growing popularity of the automobile.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 14-15; Patrick Gannon, “Wave Floating Idea for Bus to Wrightsville,” *Wilmington Morning Star*, 13 July 2007, 1B; Catherine W. Bishir and Michael T. Southern, *A Guide to the Historic Architecture of Eastern North Carolina* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 257-58; William M. Reaves, *Strength Through Struggle: The Chronological and Historical Record of the African-American Community in Wilmington, North Carolina 1865-1950*, ed. Beverly Tetterton (Wilmington, N.C.: New Hanover County Public Library, 1998), 322-24; Tony P. Wrenn, *Wilmington North Carolina: An Architectural and Historical Portrait* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1984), 272-73.

<sup>16</sup> Chamber of Commerce, *The City of Wilmington, the Metropolis and Port of North Carolina: Its Advantages and Interests, Also a Series of Sketches of Representative Business Houses* (Wilmington, NC: Wilmington Stamp and Printing Co., 1912), 23; Division of Community Planning, N.C. Department of Conservation and Development, *Future Land Use Plan: Wilmington, North Carolina* (Wilmington, N.C.: State of North Carolina, 1962), 7.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>18</sup> Tetterton, *Lost But Not Forgotten*, 14-15.

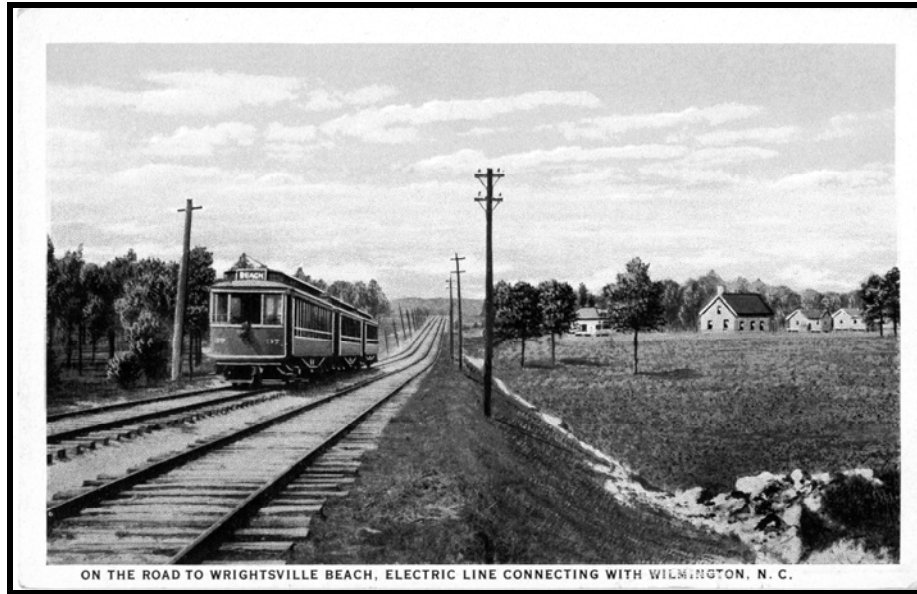


Figure 4. An electric streetcar on the way to Wrightsville Beach. (Courtesy of the New Hanover County Public Library, Wilmington, N.C.)

As was the case in Wilmington, the decline in the use of streetcars and trains across the United States stemmed from the rise of the automobile. (See figure 5) In *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, author Chester H. Liebs examines early impressions of the automobile. According to Liebs, downtown merchants viewed the automobile as a mere trend, but slowly recognized growing consumer demand as repair shops began servicing automobiles and carriage shops evolved into auto showrooms. As automobiles became larger and faster, cities widened streets, increased parking, added gas stations, lights, and signs.<sup>19</sup> Discussing this shift, Stilgoe writes, “a great age of auto-mobile-shaped spatial design dawned, and the era of the corridor ended.”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Chester H. Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile: American Roadside Architecture* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1985), 9.

<sup>20</sup> Stilgoe, *Metropolitan Corridor*, 339.



Figure 5. An increase in the usage of automobiles was visible on Front Street by the 1930s. (Star-News Archive, New Hanover Public Library, Wilmington, N.C.)

Indeed, the speed of automobiles altered the concept of distance and time by rendering remote locations accessible. FDR's New Deal introduced a revival of the housing market, and limitations on the development of both residential and commercial property lifted exponentially with the economic boom which followed World War II. Though 300,000 homes were built annually in the 1930s, the numbers increased to 1 million by 1946, and by 1950, the number reached 2 million. Decentralization became even more pronounced following World War II with the creation of freeways and superhighways, which further reduced time in relation to distance, and accelerated the decline of railroads. Delivery trucks replaced freight trains as a means of carrying cargo, and industrialists looked to the spacious suburbs to develop new plants for manufacturing and shipping goods. Baby Boomers were living in a period of unprecedented economic prosperity, and many were eager to capitalize on their good fortunes. This increased

decentralization spurred numerous consequences. As Americans fled to the suburbs, businesses followed suit, and downtown areas across the United States fell into a state of economic disrepair.<sup>21</sup>

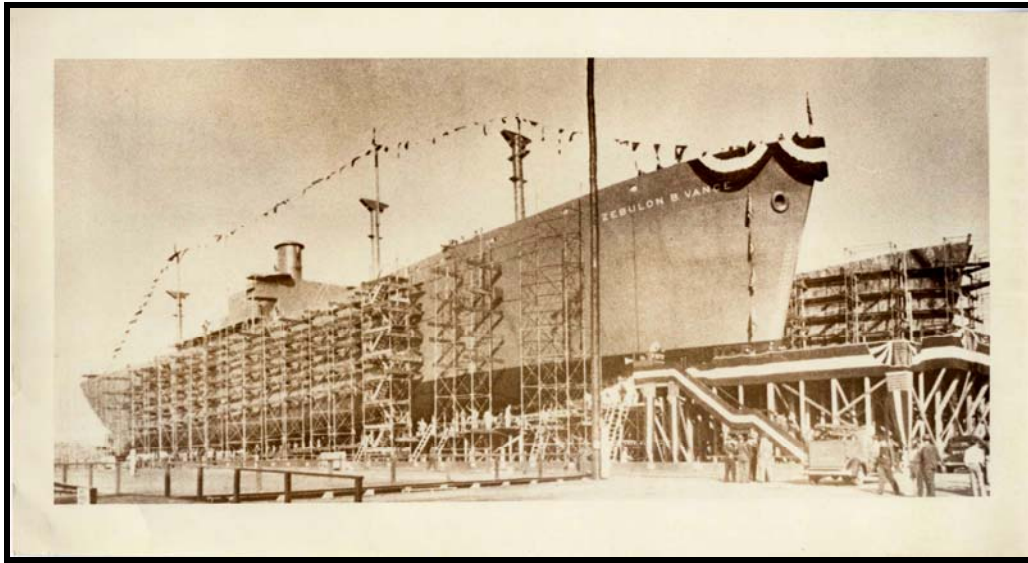


Figure 6. Launched in December 1941, the *Zebulon B. Vance* was the first Liberty ship built at Wilmington's shipyard. (Star-News Archive, New Hanover Public Library, Wilmington, N.C.)

In Wilmington, the end of World War II meant an end to a booming war-time industry as the Wilmington shipyard ceased production on Liberty ships and C2 cargo vessels. (See figure 6) Developed at a cost of over \$20 million, the North Carolina Shipbuilding Company employed approximately 21,000 workers at its peak in 1943, with a gross payroll of \$52,390,140.05. Though much of the shipyard's workforce elected to stay in the Wilmington area following the close of World War II, employment opportunities were scattered at numerous companies operating outside of the city of Wilmington. While the boiler manufacturer, Babcock and Wilcox, relocated to the Wilmington shipyard in 1951, the company later moved operations one

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<sup>21</sup> Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 15; Bernard J. Frieden and Lynne B. Sagalyn, *Downtown, Inc.: How America Rebuilds Cities* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1989), 11-12.

mile outside of town. As a result, one of downtown Wilmington's largest employers and key sources of revenue was the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad.<sup>22</sup>

Chartered on January 3, 1834 as the Wilmington and Raleigh Railroad, the announcement of the creation of the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad came on March 1, 1871, following the unification of railroads from South Carolina to Virginia. When further expansion into Florida rendered the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad's headquarters in Wilmington strategically unfeasible, the board of directors for the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad made the decision to relocate to Jacksonville, Florida. December 15, 1955, also known as "Black Thursday," marked the day in which Atlantic Coast Line officials publicly announced news of the impending relocation. With a workforce of approximately 1,500 employed at the company's headquarters in Wilmington, \$6.5 million in annual payroll was lost to the city as the railroad's employees and their families relocated to Jacksonville in what became the largest move by an individual company, in terms of volume, up to that date. Spanning five years, the relocation process involved the transfer of employees along with their families and possessions and company property to Jacksonville, and was completed on October 2, 1960. Upon leaving Wilmington, the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad Company left a vacuum in Wilmington's economy. To alleviate the financial blow to the city (and to rid itself of unneeded space), the four buildings which served as the company's

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<sup>22</sup> North Carolina Shipbuilding Company, *Five Years of North Carolina Shipbuilding: North Carolina Shipbuilding Company, 1941-1946* (Wilmington, NC: The North Carolina Shipbuilder, 1946), 7, 14-19; Ralph Scott, *The Wilmington Shipyard: Wielding a Fleet for Victory in World War II* (Charleston, SC: History Press, 2007), 89, 99-100; Duncan P. Randall, "Wilmington, North Carolina: The Historical Development of a Port City," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, No. 3, Vol. 58 (September 1968), 448-449; Alan D. Watson, *Wilmington: Port of North Carolina* (Columbus, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1992), 154-155; "War Swelled Wilmington, Made Permanent Changes," *Wilmington's 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary: the History of Wilmington and Its Place in the Cape Fear Region* (Wilmington, NC: Star News, 1989), 63.



headquarters in Wilmington were donated to the city, and the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad provided financial assistance to the Committee of 100's efforts to recruit new businesses.<sup>23</sup>

Also known as the Great Wilmington Industrial Development Committee, Inc., the non-profit Committee of 100 played a key role in attracting new industries to the region. Plans for the creation of the Committee of 100 began in 1954, and the organization materialized six months prior to the Atlantic Coast Line's announcement on Black Thursday, which suggests that the Committee of 100 was not a response to the Atlantic Coast Line's impending departure. Rather, the organization was a response to the closing of the Wilmington shipyard and subsequent loss of employment opportunities. As the brainchild of Al Jones, the President of Tide Water Power, Inc., part of the Committee of 100's mission was to organize business recruiting efforts which, to that point, were fragmented. Founding member John Fox pointed out, "Wilmington had 120,000 residents in 1945, but when the shipyards closed it was like the tides going out. We were back to 45,000 literally overnight."<sup>24</sup>

As one of the developers and participants in the Committee of 100, Mayor Dan Cameron played an integral part in the city's transition during this period by aiding in the recruiting process. Between 1955 and 1965, approximately seventeen companies such as General Electric, Du Pont, and Corning, relocated to New Hanover County. Just as the city worked to offset the

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<sup>23</sup> Charles Kernan, *The Story of the Atlantic Coast Line: 1830-1930 and 1990* (Wilmington, N.C.: privately printed, 1990), 6, 23-25; Glenn Hoffman, *Building a Great Railroad: A History of the Atlantic Coastline Railroad Company*, ed. Richard E. Broussard (United States: CSX Corporate Communications and Public Affairs, 1998), 11-12, 276-279; Watson, *Port of North Carolina* 116-117; "Railroad's Pullout Galvanized City, Spurred Industrial Growth," *Wilmington's 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary*, 66; Tetterton, *Lost But Not Forgotten*, 136-138.

<sup>24</sup> The Committee of 100, "Wilmington Industrial Development, Inc.: General Information," file Committee of 100, LHC; Bernadette Hearne, "Railroad's Exodus Hurt Wilmington, Helped Committee," *Wilmington Morning Star*, 1 October 1989, 1E, file Committee of 100, LHC; Maggie Jones, "Committee of 100 Plays Major Role in City," *Wilmington Morning Star*, 6B, file Committee of 100, LHC.

loss of the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad Company, Wilmington also underwent an architectural facelift via urban renewal.<sup>25</sup>

While urban renewal began in Wilmington in 1961 when City Council approved a plan to clean seventy-four acres of marred commercial and residential property, the roots of urban renewal date back to 1937. Aimed at providing housing to low-income families, the Federal Housing Act of 1937 called for the destruction of slums and the construction of adequate housing. Because the Act failed to properly explain how sufficient housing would be developed, Senator William H. Taft introduced the Housing Act of 1949. The 1949 Act called for a “two-thirds” compromise, whereby the federal government would absorb two thirds of the cost of developing a project to a city’s one third. Additionally, the 1949 Act introduced the term “Urban Redevelopment,” and declared, as a National Housing Policy, “the realization as soon as feasible of the goal of a home and a suitable living environment for every American family.”<sup>26</sup>

While the Housing Act of 1949 was an attempt to correct oversights made in the previous Act, it also authorized the clearance of low-income housing projects situated in historically significant towns and cities. Contributing further to the destruction of the American landscape were the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956 and Housing Act of 1956.<sup>27</sup> The two Acts threatened to demolish historic landmarks and fabric in both urban and rural environments in an organized effort at wholesale redevelopment. Signs of the imperfect practice of urban renewal were evident in downtown Wilmington throughout the 1960s. Much of the property donated by the Atlantic

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<sup>25</sup> Chris E. Fonvielle, Jr., *Historic Lower Cape Fear: An Illustrated History* (San Antonio, TX: Historical Publishing Network, 2007), 60; “Railroad’s Pullout Galvanized City, Spurred Industrial Growth,” *Wilmington’s 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary*, 66; “1960s Saw Social, Economic Upheaval,” *Wilmington’s 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary*, 66; Tetterton, *Lost But Not Forgotten*, 138-139.

<sup>26</sup> “1960s Saw Social, Economic Upheaval,” *Wilmington’s 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary*, 66; Jeanne R. Lowe, *Cities in a Race With Time: Progress and Poverty in America’s Renewing Cities* (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), 27-33; Moe and Wilkie, *Changing Places*, 57-58.

<sup>27</sup> James A. Glass, *The Beginnings of a New National Historic Program, 1957-1969* (Nashville, TN: American Association for State and Local History, 1990), 3-4.

Coast Line Railroad was demolished, with the exception of the building D, which would later house the Wilmington Police Department. (See figure 7) Other large buildings slated for demolition included the Champion Cotton Compress, Hotel Wilmington, and warehouses and buildings owned by Alexander Sprunt and Sons.<sup>28</sup>



Figure 7. Demolition of Atlantic Coast Line's Union Station in 1970. (Star-News Archive, New Hanover Public Library, Wilmington, N.C.)

With a budget of over \$58.9 million allocated towards the renewal process, city planners developed a number of structures which improved the quality of life in downtown Wilmington. In place of razed buildings, the city of Wilmington constructed a new hotel, parking deck, Coast Guard docking station and a building for the recently established Cape Fear Technical Institute (later known as Cape Fear Community College). As often was the case, buildings with historical significance were lost in the process. However the negative effects of urban renewal did not

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<sup>28</sup> "1960s Saw Social, Economic Upheaval," *Wilmington's 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary*, 66; Tetterton, *Lost But Not Forgotten*, 140.

impact Wilmington alone, but were felt across the country. Indeed, Jane Jacobs, one of the most vocal critics of urban renewal, addressed the evils of tearing down one landscape merely to replace it with another in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. In the book, Jacobs wrote, “this is not the rebuilding of cities. This is the sacking of cities.”<sup>29</sup>

An editor of *Architectural Forum*, Jacobs spent the late 1950s and early 1960s locked in battles against urban renewal in New York City. Successfully championing the preservation of Washington Square and preventing the construction of Robert Moses’ Broome Street expressway, Jacobs and her peers were put to the test when the *New York Times* reported that Pennsylvania Station would be replaced with Madison Square Garden. Despite coordinated marches pushing for a reversal of policy, the sluggish litigation process which led to the passing of the Landmarks Law could not keep pace with the demolition of Penn Station. In *Preserving New York: Winning the Right to Protect a City’s Landmarks*, Anthony C. Wood discusses the potency of the Landmarks Law. Wood examines how the passage of such a law demonstrates that politicians must walk a fine line when appeasing constituents. On one side are developers and the public pushing for change, and on the other are preservationists who seek to conserve the region’s architectural heritage.<sup>30</sup>

The argument for preservation received a significant boost in 1966, with the publication of Albert Rains and Laurance G. Henderson’s *With Heritage So Rich*. A collection of essays sponsored by the U.S. Conference of Mayors, the report expressed both the necessity and viability of preservation in light of urban renewal. Acknowledging the report’s

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<sup>29</sup> Tetterton, *Lost But Not Forgotten*, 138-140; Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Vintage Books, 1961), 2.

<sup>30</sup> Mike Wallace, “Preserving the Past: A History of Historic Preservation in the United States,” in *Mickey Mouse History and Other Essays on American Memory* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996), 187; Anthony C. Wood, *Preserving New York: Winning the Right to Protect a City’s Landmarks* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 184, 298, 307.

recommendations, Congress passed the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966. One of the lasting impacts of the NHPA was that it eased restrictions on the National Register of Historic Places. Afterward, structures, objects, and districts of local, state, and national significance could be added to the list. As preservationists and scholars such as William J. Murtagh and Norman Tyler note, the key word is *district*.<sup>31</sup>

Prior to the establishment of the NHPA, only a few cities in the United States featured historic districts. Though cities in Virginia such as Alexandria and Williamsburg and Winston-Salem, North Carolina passed historic district legislation in the 1940s, Charleston, South Carolina pioneered the preservation movement when Charleston's City Council passed the city's historic zoning laws in 1931. Other cities like Wilmington and Savannah established innovative historic districts enabling them to preserve their respective architectural heritage.<sup>32</sup>

In Wilmington, a study coordinated by the city's Planning and Development Commission, the New Hanover Council of Architects, and the Lower Cape Fear Historical Society led to the creation of Wilmington's Historic District in June 1962. Overseeing the city's preservation efforts and enforcing zoning regulations was the Board of Architectural Review, which later became Wilmington's Historic District Commission (now the HDC is known as the

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<sup>31</sup> Albert Rains and Laurance G. Henderson, *With Heritage So Rich: National Trust for Historic Preservation* (Washington, DC: The Preservation Press, 1966) ; Diane Lea, "America's Preservation Ethos: A Tribute to Enduring Ideas," in *A Richer Heritage*, 10-11; William J. Murtagh, *Keeping Time: The History and Theory of Preservation in America* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2006), 49-51; Norman Tyler, *Historic Preservation: An Introduction to Its History, Principles, and Practice* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2000), 44-45; Richard Moe and Carter Wilkie, *Changing Places*, 241.

<sup>32</sup> Rains and Henderson, *With Heritage So Rich*, 150; Lee and Emma Adler, *Savannah Renaissance* (Charleston, S.C.: Wyrick & Company, 2003), 6; "Threats to Old Buildings Led to Historic District Creation," *Wilmington's 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary*, 67.

Historic Preservation Commission). Divided into sections, Wilmington's Historic District featured commercial, residential and mixed-use zones listed on the National Register.<sup>33</sup>

In 1958, the Historic Charleston Foundation added to its legacy by establishing the country's first revolving fund for preservation. Typically associated with preservation, revolving funds allow organizations to provide a constant flow of money for a given purpose—provided that previous loans were repaid. Similar to Charleston, the Historic Savannah Foundation successfully launched its own revolving fund program in 1959, and under the leadership of Lee Adler, the program blossomed. A leader in the preservation movement, Adler asserted that the preservation of buildings was an economically viable alternative to unrestrained development.<sup>34</sup>

Adler visited North Carolina in 1974 and gave a speech on the success of the HSF's revolving fund at facilitating preservation efforts in Savannah, and its potential in North Carolina. During his stay, Adler discussed North Carolina's attempts at urban renewal and suggested there was a better alternative. Adler proposed a statewide revolving loan program similar to that used by Savannah, but which would extend to all cities and rural regions. Cheaper and less destructive than urban renewal, rehabilitating buildings which already existed could provide the state with a means of retaining its heritage. Furthermore, the preservation of buildings conveyed a sense of tradition and heritage for North Carolina, which in turn generated an economic boost in tourism similar to those witnessed in both Williamsburg and Savannah.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> "Threats to Old Buildings Led to Historic District Creation," *Wilmington's 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary*, 67; Gareth Evans, "Retaining Wilmington: The Role of Class, Heritage and Memory in History Preservation, 1882-1963," Masters thesis, University of North Carolina at Wilmington, 2006, 147.

Junior League of Wilmington. *Old Wilmington Guidebook* (Wilmington, NC: The Junior League of Wilmington, NC, Incorporated, 1978), 9.

<sup>34</sup> Robert R. Weyeneth, *Historic Preservation for a Living City: Historic Charleston Foundation, 1947-1997* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 2000), 14; Historic Charleston Foundation, "Revolving Fund," [http://www.historiccharleston.org/preservation/how\\_revolving\\_fund.html](http://www.historiccharleston.org/preservation/how_revolving_fund.html) (accessed July 27, 2008).

<sup>35</sup> Myrick J. Howard, *Buying Time for Heritage: How to Save an Endangered Historic Property* (Raleigh: Preservation North Carolina, 2007), 1-3.

Founded in 1939 as the Society for the Preservation of North Carolina Antiquities, Preservation North Carolina listened to Adler and incorporated a revolving fund into its operation in 1975. Using the revolving fund in its “Endangered Properties Program,” PNC preserved over 500 historic properties starting in 1982. During a previous visit to North Carolina, Adler met with the Historic Wilmington Foundation, and offered a solution for how the organization could “save the city.”<sup>36</sup> Founded in 1966 by Thomas H. Wright, Jr. as a response to the destruction wrought by urban renewal in downtown Wilmington, the HWF operated the first revolving fund of its kind in North Carolina. (See Figure 8)



Figure 8. Thomas Henry Wright, Jr. and Elizabeth Wright stand in front of Wilmington’s oldest standing structure, the Mitchell-Anderson House, during a historic plaque ceremony in 1978. (Star-News Archive, New Hanover Public Library, Wilmington, N.C.)

According to Adler, the organization needed to find individuals who were willing to purchase deteriorating buildings in Wilmington’s Historic District, and the HWF needed to

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<sup>36</sup> Edward F. Turberg, architectural historian, interview with the author, 12 September 2008.

renovate the properties. Using money collected by member subscriptions or contributions, the HWF purchased numerous historically significant structures within Wilmington's Historic District and renovated and resold the properties with protective easements attached. Easements are legal restrictions recorded in property deeds which identify the physical elements of a property that new property owners must maintain and preserve.<sup>37</sup> In addition to renovating properties and adding easements, the HWF also maintained a plaque program. By providing historical information relating to the buildings to which they were attached, plaques promoted public awareness of both the history and preservation of downtown Wilmington.<sup>38</sup>

The founder of the HWF, Thomas Henry Wright, Jr. was born in 1918 to one of the most respected families in North Carolina. Wrightsville Beach receives its name from his great-great grandfather, Judge Josh Grainger Wright. Both status and wealth provided Thomas Henry Wright, Jr. with the opportunity to choose any career he desired, but Wright elected to pursue an A. B. in chemistry from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. After serving in the U.S. Navy in World War II, Wright married Margaret Guest Taylor in 1946. After ten years of marriage which produced two children, Taylor died due to illness. Three years later, Wright married Elizabeth Devereux Labouisse. Elizabeth Wright's great-great-great grandfather, Richard Bennehan, was one of the founders of the University of North Carolina. Additionally, Elizabeth Wright's family had strong connections to another prominent North Carolina family, the Camerons. Thus, the wedding between Thomas Wright and Elizabeth Wright was a union of North Carolina's elite. Serving as the president of the Wright Chemical Corporation, Wright was

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<sup>37</sup> Murtagh, *Keeping Time*, 208.

<sup>38</sup> Preservation North Carolina, "What is Preservation North Carolina," <http://www.presnc.org/content/view/55/112/> (accessed July 28, 2008); Historic Wilmington Foundation, "History," <http://www.historicwilmington.org/history.asp> (accessed July 28, 2008) Division of Community Planning, N.C. Department of Conservation and Development, *Historic District Development Plan* (Washington, D.C.: Clearinghouse for Federal Scientific and Technical Information, 1968), 50-53; "Plaque Program," file Historic Wilmington Foundation—Plaque Program, DIC.



also director of Wachovia Bank and Trust, president of the St. John's Museum of Art, and served on the board of trustees for Woodberry Forest, Cape Fear Academy, and the University of North Carolina at Wilmington. Immersed in the community, it was the Wrights' efforts at preserving Wilmington's architectural heritage for which they became most recognized and respected. In addition to establishing the HWF, the Wrights saved thirty historically significant buildings from the wrecking ball.<sup>39</sup>



Figure 9. Established in 1973 by Malcolm Murray and Joe Reaves, the Cotton Exchange was a retail center which demonstrated the possibilities of adaptive use. (Photograph by author.)

Wright and the HWF played a significant role in spurring the revival of Wilmington's Historic District. Additional renovation efforts in the Central Business District exemplified how preservation could be used for profit. In 1973, Malcolm Murray and Joe Reaves restored a series of nineteenth-century buildings into a shopping complex containing stores, restaurants, bars, and courtyards. When it opened in 1976, the Cotton Exchange was a demonstration of how adaptive use was a viable option to improve the economic potential of existing structures in downtown

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<sup>39</sup> Susan Block, *The Wrights of Wilmington* (Wilmington, N.C.: Wilmington Printing Company, 1992), 188-124.

Wilmington.<sup>40</sup> (See figure 9) In 1978, Wright worked with William Fetner to model Chandler's Wharf after Wilmington's waterfront during the nineteenth-century. Similar to the Cotton Exchange in that it housed shops and restaurants, Chandler's Wharf also contained homes and a nautical museum which celebrated the region's maritime history.<sup>41</sup>

Through the creative endeavors of economic-minded preservationists, sections of downtown Wilmington underwent a renaissance during a time when the city endured financial uncertainty. The impending development of Independence Mall jeopardized the Central Business District's status as a retail center. Likewise, the gradual decay of aging buildings and streetscapes served as a deterrent for potential consumers. However, as research suggests, the tribulations which plagued downtown Wilmington were a source of exasperation for other cities as well.

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<sup>40</sup> "Crisis of the 1970s: Questions, Solutions," *Wilmington's 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary*, 74.

<sup>41</sup> Tetterton, *Lost But Not Forgotten*, 143-144.

### CHAPTER THREE: PLACING DARE IN CONTEXT

As an organization with a multi-layered mission, the challenge of classifying and categorizing the Downtown Area Revitalization Effort, Inc. becomes increasingly complex when one recognizes that the agency's goals altered in accordance with the city's changing needs. In the beginning, DARE sought to rehabilitate the deteriorating buildings and improve the aesthetic surroundings of downtown Wilmington's Central Business District. Yet, by the mid-1980s, DARE shifted focus more towards marketing and business recruiting in an effort to boost economic development and increase the number of consumer dollars spent downtown. Before analyzing DARE and Wilmington in detail, it is necessary to examine similar cities and organizations which functioned as models for DARE. By placing DARE into context with other organizations, one understands which organizations and cities influenced DARE's mission, and in the process, altered the landscape of Wilmington's Central Business District. Furthermore, by juxtaposing DARE with similar organizations which specialized in either historic preservation or economic development, it is possible to determine what qualities enabled the organization to succeed and what shortcomings hindered progress.

#### **DARE in Preservation**

The primary influence for DARE in terms of preservation was the Historic Wilmington Foundation. Both the preservation efforts of the HWF in Wilmington's Historic District and the success of the Cotton Exchange and Chandler's Wharf led Mayor Ben Halterman to believe that economic revitalization through historic preservation was viable. However, the primary influence for the HWF in terms of adaptive use and revolving funds was Lee Adler of the Historic Savannah Foundation. Furthermore, a study published for the HWF and Greater Wilmington Chamber of Commerce recognized the financial benefits historic preservation provided for cities

such as Savannah and Charleston. Published in 1976, Thomas G. McGaskey's *The Future of Wilmington's Past* is a study on how a city's heritage and architecture may supply the city with an additional source of income. Though the study focuses on Wilmington, McGaskey writes, "Charleston and Savannah are nearby examples of this fact, and restoration or preservation in such cities are the catalysts for projecting their national image in tourism."<sup>42</sup>

Similar to Wilmington, Savannah's preservation efforts picked up largely in response to the increase in construction in the mid-1950s. Though several small historic organizations existed within the city, Savannah's business establishment viewed historic preservation as an "elitist activity."<sup>43</sup> Dismissing the potential of preservation, Savannah's Chamber of Commerce advocated the development of high-rise buildings in an effort to modernize the city and bring it into the twentieth century.<sup>44</sup> Popular sentiment changed following the demolition of Savannah's City Market in 1954, which in turn led to the establishment of the Historic Savannah Foundation. Inspired by Walter Hartridge, a preservationist and president of the Georgia Historical Society from 1952 to 1962, the HSF spawned from seven women who were wives of local business leaders. During its first meeting on June 28, 1955, members of fledgling organization determined the HSF's long range program was to seek out properties threatened with demolition, and to purchase them whenever possible.<sup>45</sup>

Considered by many preservationists and scholars to be the driving force of Savannah's renaissance, Lee Adler succeeded Albert Stoddard as president of the HSF in 1961, thus beginning the era in which the organization received national recognition. A native Savannahian with strong ties to the community, Adler was an investment banker who came from a long line of

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<sup>42</sup> Thomas McGaskey, *The Future of Wilmington's Past* (Wilmington, NC: Travel Development, 1976), 2.

<sup>43</sup> Lee Adler and Emma Adler, *Savannah Renaissance* (Charleston, SC: Wyrick & Co., 2003), 7.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 7-8.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 11-13.

merchants, and his mother, Elinor Adler, was one of the seven founders of the HSF. One of the successes of the HSF during Adler's tenure was its revolving fund, which the organization used as a tool to buy threatened properties and sell them to individuals who would restore them. The Adlers spread word of the success of the revolving fund, and as the popularity of this method of preservation grew, organizations in North Carolina such as the Historic Wilmington Foundation and Preservation North Carolina began using it.<sup>46</sup>

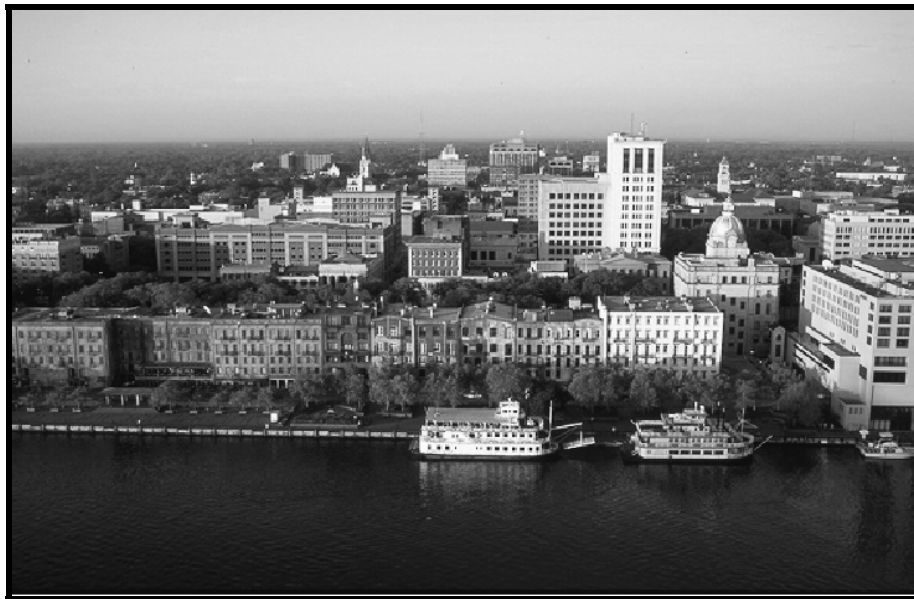


Figure 10. A view of Savannah, Georgia's historic waterfront. (Courtesy of Savannah Area Convention & Visitors Bureau.)

However, Lee Adler and the HSF recognized that protecting old buildings and Savannah's heritage did not appeal to all politicians and developers. To persuade politicians of the value of preservation, Adler tied it to tourism and suggested both politicians and business leaders work to increase Savannah's tourist appeal. By 1987, tourism provided Savannah with annual revenues in excess of \$200 million. The success of the HSF's efforts in downtown Savannah (see figure 10), and Adler's ability to communicate with civic leaders, inspired Adler

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<sup>46</sup> Roberta Brandes Gratz, *The Living City* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989), 38-39; J. Myrick Howard, *Buying Time for Heritage: How to Save an Endangered Property* (Raleigh, NC: Preservation North Carolina, 2007), 1.

to take on a new project: the revitalization of Savannah's first suburb, the Victorian District. Between the low-cost housing which existed in the Victorian District and the aristocratic nature of the HSF, Adler looked beyond the organization for assistance.<sup>47</sup>

Concerned with the decay of historic structures and displacement of minorities, Adler said, "Black people built a lot of this town...with sensible rehabilitation, it was clear there could be a stable neighborhood for new and old residents alike."<sup>48</sup> With the aid of other dedicated preservationists, Adler organized the Savannah Landmark Rehabilitation Project. Labeling the residents as the "responsible poor," Adler believed that many of them were good housekeepers who simply could not afford to purchase their own homes. With the assistance of numerous government agencies and nonprofit organizations, the Savannah Landmark Rehabilitation Project acquired and assisted with renovations on 300 housing units. According to Adler, "The trick is to involve people so heavily they can't get out when the going gets tough."<sup>49</sup>

Fitting the mold for Gratz's definition of urban husbandry, the extent of Adler's influence expands beyond the streets of Savannah, and exists in downtown areas across the country. While both Thomas Wright, Jr. of the HWF and, to a lesser degree, Gene Merritt of DARE practiced urban husbandry and were influenced by the practices laid out by Adler, they were, like Adler himself, inspired by the preservation efforts of Charleston, South Carolina.

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<sup>47</sup> Gratz, *The Living City*, 40, 49.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>49</sup> Lee Adler and Emma Adler, *Savannah Renaissance*, 66-67, 74; Ibid., 54.



Figure 11. A view of Historic Charleston from Church Street. (Star-News Archive, New Hanover Public Library, Wilmington, N.C.)

With a long history of preservation, Charleston is often viewed as the example other cities emulate when seeking to protect their architectural and historic roots. (See figure 11)

Though Charleston's attempts at preservation gained strength by the support of local, state, and federal agencies, similar to Savannah, it was the efforts of the community which stimulated the preservation movement. While organizations such as the Daughters of the American Revolution and the Society of Colonial Dames both played roles in preserving Charleston's architecture in the early part of the twentieth century, the city government engaged itself in preservation affairs in 1931 by creating Charleston's Historic District. The creation of Charleston's Historic District was the result of a request made by Susan Pringle Frost, the president of the Society for the Preservation of Old Buildings. Originally pleading for new legislation which would prevent the removal of old woodwork and ironwork from historic buildings, Frost compelled City Council to

ratify the general zoning ordinance leading to the establishment of the Old and Historic Charleston District.<sup>50</sup>

Sixteen years after the creation of Charleston's Historic District, the Historic Charleston Foundation was incorporated. According to Frederick Law Olmstead, Jr., the HCF saw Charleston as a living city and recognized the value of blending architecture from different periods because they served as "integral parts of a live and ever-changing community."<sup>51</sup> To finance restoration projects, the HCF developed a revolving fund in 1957. As the first of its kind, the HCF's revolving fund provided a means of financial support for preservation projects which would have gone ignored by donations and grants. If an individual or group had the motivation to rehabilitate a historic structure, funding for such projects became more accessible. In continuing with its efforts at fundraising and preservation awareness, the HCF assisted the National Trust for Historic Preservation with one of its better known preservation efforts, Drayton Hall.<sup>52</sup>

Built between 1738 and 1742, Drayton Hall served as a mansion for rice planter John Drayton. The mansion's architecture, which preservationists consider to be the best example of Georgian Palladian in the country, is preserved in its original, pristine condition. With the financial assistance of the HCF, the National Trust purchased Drayton Hall in 1974. Though the National Trust owns the property, the HCF provides oversight, and ensures that no alterations are made to the building's integrity. Thus, with the exception of repairs, Drayton Hall remains one of

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<sup>50</sup> Murtaugh, *Keeping Time*, 89; Robert R. Weyeneth, *Historic Preservation for a Living City: Historic Charleston Foundation, 1947-1997* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2000), 13-14.

<sup>51</sup> Weyeneth, *Historic Preservation for a Living City*, 33.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 133, 144.



the few examples of architecture which remains exactly as it was when built in the eighteenth century.<sup>53</sup>

As demonstrated through its mission and practices, the HCF was an organization of practical preservation which worked to maintain the historical fabric of Charleston. Similar to Wilmington and other downtowns, the survival of Charleston's architectural history was threatened by urban renewal in the 1950s and 1960s and by revitalization efforts in the 1970s and 1980s. However, the HCF maintained a proactive approach and communicated with city officials and developers. Additionally, the strong, consistent leadership of Joseph Riley, Jr. has proven beneficial to Charleston's preservation and revitalization efforts, as Riley has served as the city's mayor since 1974. In anticipating the potential consequences urban renewal would have on Charleston, the HCF worked with the Board of Architectural Review to revise existing zoning ordinances and expand the size of the Charleston Historic District, thereby protecting more buildings from potential demolition. Though the HCF demonstrated its commitment to preservation, the organization proved it also understood the benefits of measured growth when a downtown revitalization plan called for the construction of a hotel and convention center in a section of Charleston's King Street. Though various preservation organizations came out in opposition of the proposed complex, the HCF offered its support, with the condition that the hotel and convention center modify its height and the size of its parking lot. Though the HCF's approach received criticism from ardent preservationists, historian Robert Weyeneth suggests that the "preservation in a living city like Charleston represented a negotiation of interests, informed by the sensitivity to the historic setting and sympathy to economic realities."<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 132-136; Drayton Hall, "Miss Charlotte's Wish," [http://www.draytonhall.org/research/history/20th\\_century.html](http://www.draytonhall.org/research/history/20th_century.html), (accessed 10 October 2008).

<sup>54</sup> Bill Reilly, "Comparing City Governments, The Old and the New: Charleston and Wilmington," *The People's Civic Record* 8 (September 2002), 8; Weyeneth, *Historic Preservation for a Living City*, 73, 93-101.

Similar to both Charleston and Savannah, Wilmington maintained much of its architectural heritage despite the massive destruction caused by urban renewal. Additionally, as a city south of the Mason-Dixon Line, Wilmington's history as a southern city with a legacy of triumph and tragedy during the Civil War was, like Charleston and Savannah, reflected in its architecture. Likewise, as cities located along rivers, Charleston, Savannah, and Wilmington shared a common link, which was one of the reasons Merritt and DARE used the two cities as models. Furthermore, Charleston's proximity to the tourist attraction, Patriot Place, which housed the U.S.S. *Yorktown* along with four other ships, invited similar comparisons to Wilmington's use of the U.S.S. *North Carolina* as a floating museum.<sup>55</sup> Though DARE did not incorporate the same level of dedication to preservation as demonstrated by organizations in Charleston or Savannah, much of this is due to the state of downtown Wilmington's Commercial Business District when DARE was created. Viewed as inhospitable and unmarketable by visitors and nearby residents, DARE waged a battle in two directions by improving both the aesthetics of the CBD and its economy.<sup>56</sup> By comparison, though Savannah and Charleston both experienced growing pains in the 1970s, the pleasant atmospheres of their respective historic districts were generally inviting to tourists. In short, Savannah and Charleston were symbolic of solving problems of the past, and to save Wilmington, it was also necessary for DARE to look to organizations which practiced modern methods of revitalization.

Upon resigning as executive director of DARE in 1982, Gene Merritt acknowledged that Charleston and Savannah were among the cities which served as models for the agency's revitalization efforts. Merritt said, "we paid a lot of attention to the east coast cities—older cities

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<sup>55</sup> "Patriots Point Museum: Historic Charleston Harbor," <http://www.patriotspoint.org/exhibits/>, (accessed 11 October 2008).

<sup>56</sup> Wilmington, N.C. Mayor's Task Force on Core Revitalization, *Revitalization in Wilmington/ [a report by the] Mayor's Task Force for Revitalization in Wilmington* (Wilmington, N.C.: The Task Force, 1976), 1-2.

where preservation was important. We looked closely at Charleston, Savannah, Washington, N.C. and New Bern.”<sup>57</sup> However, while Merritt and other DARE members grasped the preservation aspects and historic qualities of the southern cities, they failed to recognize the level of commitment required for maintaining the historical fabric which appealed to tourists. Instead, DARE focused on the results more than the formula required to meet such success. However, as an agency established in the late 1970s, DARE also examined and interacted with revitalization groups and cities which experienced conditions similar to those faced by Wilmington. Though DARE collaborated with organizations working across the state of North Carolina via the North Carolina Downtown Development Association, DARE also networked with organizations from cities across the United States through the International Downtown Executives Association, or IDEA. Among the organizations which DARE interacted with was Downtown Denver Partnership, Inc. which experienced considerable success during Denver’s revitalization efforts.<sup>58</sup>

Recognized for its history as a frontier town, Denver was the third largest city west of the Missouri River prior to 1940. Like the other cities, Denver’s economic status declined following the development of automobiles and superhighways. A decline in the city’s traditional industries, which consisted of ranching, mining, and logging, followed with a dramatic increase in tourism, convinced politicians and developers in Denver to explore urban renewal. Due to the intervention of Dana Crawford, one of the sections which did not fall victim to urban renewal was Larimer Square. Appointing herself as president of Larimer Square Associates, Crawford purchased buildings one at a time along Larimer Street, racing against urban renewal. (See figure 12) When

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<sup>57</sup> Deborah Kelly, “DARE Stemmed City’s Decay,” *Wilmington Star News*, 28 June 1982, 1B, file DARE, Inc. Up to 1989, LIC.

<sup>58</sup> Mary M. Gornto, “Continuing Data System Measures Downtown Health,” file Economic Development: 1978-1982, DIC.

the urban renewal project was approved in 1967, Crawford and the bulldozer “[fought] it out building by building.”<sup>59</sup>

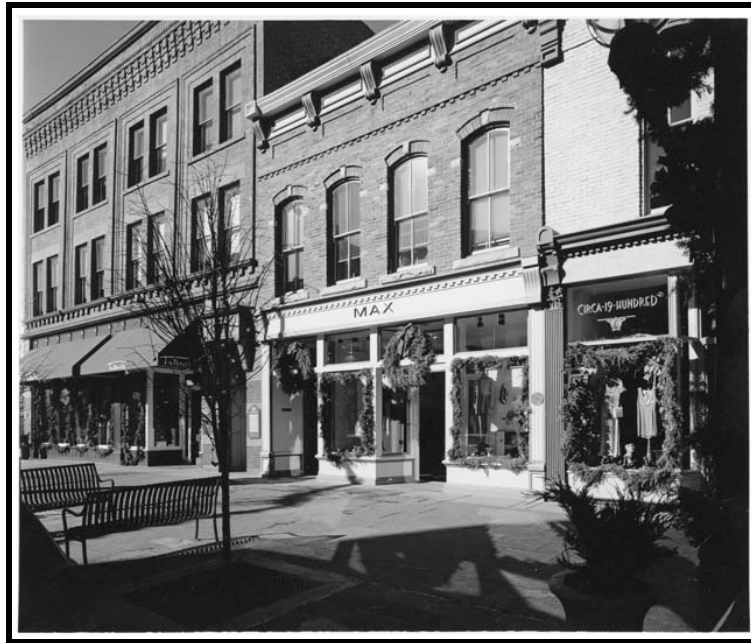


Figure 12. A view of renovated storefronts along Larimer Street in 1985. (Courtesy of the Denver Public Library.)

Though Crawford lamented for the historic buildings lost during urban renewal, when asked if her interests in Larimer Square involved preservation or profit, she replied that while it was an investment intended to produce profit, her motives were for preservation. Thus, Crawford demonstrated a philosophy similar to the Historic Charleston Foundation: pragmatic preservation. Though the HCF leaned towards preservation, Crawford, as president of the Larimer Square Association, leaned towards profit.<sup>60</sup>

To emphasize her point, Crawford’s marketing campaign Larimer Square involved the creation of a new history for old buildings. Focusing on heritage rather than actual history, Crawford created a media campaign and used propaganda to present Larimer Square as a place

<sup>59</sup> Gratz and Mintz, *Cities Back from the Edge*, 49.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 49; Judy Mattavi Morely, “Making History: Historic Preservation and Civic Identity in Denver,” in *Giving Preservation a History: Histories of Historic Preservation in the United States*, eds. Max Page and Randall Mason (New York: Routledge, 2004), 286-88.

with strong ties to the Wild West. Even if events of historical significance did not unfold on the street, what mattered most was that Larimer street presented a connection the past, thereby providing residents with a sense of pride and tourists with a reason to visit. Such a link became even more precious in light of the destruction brought by urban renewal.<sup>61</sup>

Evidence of Crawford's success in public relations and preservation appeared in 1971, when Larimer Square was designated as Denver's first historic district. Seeking out quality businesses, Crawford's Larimer Square possessed a unique flavor which appealed to residents and tourists alike. While skeptics have argued that "nostalgia is a poor customer," Crawford's efforts suggest the contrary.<sup>62</sup> Furthermore, the precedent Crawford set in the 1960s was followed in the early 1980s as many historic buildings in Lower Downtown Denver faced the wrecking ball. Stemming from a growing demand for energy resources, Denver became a haven for speculators as the need for new real estate increased at a rapid pace. To combat the second generation of urban renewal, Historic Denver, Inc. worked with the Downtown Denver Partnership, an association which advocates for commercial property owners and businesses, in a demonstration of "collaborative downtown planning."<sup>63</sup>

Though initial efforts by Historic Denver and the Denver Partnership were unsuccessful, Denver's preservation movement gained a new ally when citizens elected Federico Peña as the city's new mayor. Though Peña initially sought a new airport and convention center for Denver, he recognized the need to preserve Lower Downtown Denver, and in 1985, created the Downtown Area Plan. Acknowledging the vulnerable nature of Lower Downtown, the plan

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<sup>61</sup> Morley, "Making History," 288-90.

<sup>62</sup> Dan William Corson, "Dana Crawford: From Larimer Square to LoDo, Historic Preservation in Denver," (Masters thesis, University of Colorado at Denver, 1998) 118-121; Allison Isenberg, *Downtown America: A History of the Place and the People Who Made It* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 260.

<sup>63</sup> Richard C. Collins, Elizabeth B. Waters, and A. Bruce Dotson, *America's Downtowns*, 69-70; Morely, "Making History," 297-298; Downtown Denver Partnership, Inc., "Public Policy," [http://www.downtowndenver.com/AboutUs/Public\\_Policy.htm](http://www.downtowndenver.com/AboutUs/Public_Policy.htm), (accessed 15 October 2008).

called for measures which would improve the area's economic viability while maintaining its historic integrity. To accomplish this, the plan recommended the designation of Lower Downtown as a historic district. In 1988, Denver's City Council followed the recommendations and passed the LoDo Historic District Ordinance.<sup>64</sup>

As a testament to its success, a district visualized as developing into a bohemian district with art galleries instead became a bustling community as businesses invested in the neighborhood. According to historian Judy Mattivi Morley, "contrary to the fears of property owners that historic preservation would deflate property values, the establishment of the historic district stabilized real estate."<sup>65</sup> Thus, combining Larimer Square and LoDo, Denver is a sign of the success of "historic development."<sup>66</sup>

By proving the economic viability of historic preservation, the efforts of preservationists, planners, and politicians in Denver correlate with the principles taught by Donovan D. Rypkema. In *The Economics of Historic Preservation: A Community Leader's Guide*, Rypkema lists one hundred ways in which preservation is economically beneficial to a city. For large cities like Denver, "preserving urban historic character is vital to a city's economic competitive edge over other areas."<sup>67</sup> For smaller cities and towns without the financial means to properly organize and sustain preservation efforts on their own, Rypkema notes the success of National Trust for Historic Preservation's Main Street Program.<sup>68</sup>

Influenced by the Civic Trust in England, the National Trust created the Main Street Program in an effort to reverse the economic and architectural decay of small towns. Though the

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<sup>64</sup> Richard C. Collins, Elizabeth B. Waters, and A. Bruce Dotson, *America's Downtowns*, 70-74; Morely, "Making History," 298-300; Richard Moe and Carter Wilkie, *Changing Places*, 189.

<sup>65</sup> Morely, "Making History," 302.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 305.

<sup>67</sup> Donovan D. Rypkema, *The Economics of Historic Preservation: A Community Leader's Guide* (Washington DC: National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1994), 14-15.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

program was established in 1980, its roots derive from programs launched in 1977 by director of the Chicago office of the National Trust, Mary Means. Looking at towns with different characteristics, the National Trust sought to prove that the pedestrian mall formula, which was widely in use as a response to urban sprawl and the rise of indoor shopping malls, was not a panacea. Furthermore, the goal of Means and the National Trust was to demonstrate that each town could succeed and grow if it improved upon its own unique qualities. The three initial towns used for the Main Street experiment were Galesburg, Illinois; Hot Springs, South Dakota; and Madison, Indiana. The markets in each of the cities improved considerably over the course of the study, with thirty new stores opening in Galesburg, seven in Hot Springs, and six in Madison. Further examples of the program's early success were demonstrated by the fact that for every dollar invested in the Main Street project, eleven dollars were invested in adaptive use and rehabilitation efforts. Overall, the accomplishments of the three cities proved that adaptive use was an effective tool for economic development.<sup>69</sup>

Uniting downtown businesses with city council and the chamber of commerce, the Main Street Program called for leadership from a project manager who worked to improve the city's image while promoting the city at the same time. To perform this task, the city manager would use the Main Street Approach, which involved a four-point plan: design, organization, promotion, and economic restructuring. According to the National Trust, the points laid out in the Main Street Approach produced "fundamental changes in the downtown's economic base, making it economically feasible to put historic commercial buildings to use again."<sup>70</sup> In addition to the four-point plan, the Main Street Approach featured eight "guiding principles" which were

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<sup>69</sup> Richard V. Francaviglia, *Main Street Revisited: Time, Space, and Image Building in Small-Town America*, ed. Wayne Franklin (Iowa City, IA: University of Iowa Press, 1996), 176-77; Moe and Wilkie, *Changing Places*, 150; Linda Glisson, ed., *Revitalizing Downtown: The Professional's Guide to the Main Street Approach* (Washington, DC: National Trust for Historic Preservation, 2000), 2.

<sup>70</sup> Glisson, ed., *Revitalizing Downtown*, 3-5.

necessary to sustain economic growth through revitalization: comprehensive, incremental, self-help, public/private partnerships, assets, quality, change, and implementation.<sup>71</sup>

Following the success of Galesburg, Hot Springs, and Madison, the National Main Street Center worked in coordination with IDEA to create a second demonstration focusing on thirty cities in six states. Among the states chosen for the demonstration were Colorado, Georgia, Massachusetts, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Texas. Similar to the first demonstration, many of the cities which participated in the second phase experienced phenomenal economic growth as they underwent rehabilitations and façade renovations. With the success of the second demonstration, interest in the NMSC's Main Street Program grew, and by 1985, the center established the Main Street Network—a circle in which developers and communities interested in rehabilitation could discuss techniques for improving their towns. Members of the network could exchange ideas and read stories in the organization's newsletter, *Main Street News*. Between 1981 and 1994, the Main Street Program and its accompanying network provided support to 1,600 communities, and in that time, those communities generated 227,000 new jobs and \$16.1 billion in public and private reinvestment.<sup>72</sup>

While there are numerous examples of the success of the Main Street Program, at times the program's formula failed. As Norman Tyler points out, there are three primary reasons why the Main Street Program does not work for a community. For instance, the project manager may not work full time and, as a result, cannot properly follow through with policy in an organized, timely fashion. Another reason the program might fail would be because the board of directors appeased numerous special interest groups, and in the process, lost sight of the organization's mission. Finally, Tyler mentions that the program might fail because "some downtown groups

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<sup>71</sup> Murtaugh, *Keeping Time*, 96-97; Suzanne G. Dane, *Main Street Success Stories* (Washington, D.C.: National Main Street Center, National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1997), 5-9.

<sup>72</sup> Linda Glisson, ed., *Revitalizing Downtown*, 2-3; Rypkema, *The Economics of Historic Preservation*, 16.



were unhappy with the new show in town and sabotaged efforts in the Main Street project office.”<sup>73</sup>

Preceding the development of the Main Street Program by approximately three years, DARE did not meet the requirements to become a participant in the Main Street Network because Wilmington’s population exceeded the program’s maximum limit of 50,000 citizens. As Tyler suggests, numerous communities and organizations worked with the Main Street Program even if they did not receive direct support. Though not a direct participant, DARE interacted with the Main Street Program through IDEA, and both DARE and the Main Street Program possessed similar qualities. According to former DARE executive director Robert Murphrey, DARE’s program featured the four points used by the Main Street Program before the points received the approval of the National Trust. “Our structure was built around Administration (Organization), Planning and Urban Design (Design), CBD Services (Promotion) and Economic Development (Economic Restructuring).”<sup>74</sup>

Like Lee Adler and Dana Crawford, the Main Street Program epitomized Roberta Brandes Gratz’s concept of urban husbandry, and while DARE emulated these models through the first decade of its existence, changes in leadership and the fulfillment of many of its original goals led the organization to adapt new policies and look to new models. In the course of adjusting its approach, DARE studied cities with similar pasts, practicing what Gratz defines as *project planning*. According to Gratz, “under this Project-based Planning, the new is added at a large enough scale to overwhelm and alter what exists. What exists may be wiped out entirely, as with urban renewal.”<sup>75</sup> As DARE officials and the City of Wilmington envisioned the future of

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<sup>73</sup> Tyler, *Historic Preservation*, 176.

<sup>74</sup> Robert T. Murphrey, Community Development Planner and former DARE, Inc. Executive Director, interview with the author, 20 May 2008.

<sup>75</sup> Gratz and Mintz, *Cities Back from the Edge*, 59.

the downtown landscape, the organization looked to cities like Chattanooga, Tennessee and Mobile, Alabama for direction.



Figure 13. Through adaptive use, Terminal Station became the Choo-Choo Hotel in 1973. (Courtesy of Chattanooga-Hamilton County Bicentennial Library.)

Centered along the Tennessee River, Chattanooga shares many similar economic traits with Wilmington. Both cities possess rich histories drawing from their status as railroad centers. For Wilmington, it was the Atlantic Coast Line, and for Chattanooga, it was the Southern Railway System. Chattanooga experienced an economic decline in the 1960s, and similar to the breakup of the ACL in Wilmington in 1961, Chattanooga experienced an economic shift when all passenger services to the old Union Depot ceased running on May 1, 1971. Despite the protests of historians and preservationist, the depot and much of the land connected to the railroad were razed. Notwithstanding the destruction of historically significant property, remnants of Chattanooga's railroad heritage were still accessible at the Tennessee Valley

Railroad Museum. Furthermore, the Terminal Station was spared from the wrecking ball and, in 1973, the complex was purchased by local businessmen and renovated for adaptive use at a cost of \$4 million. Named after the popular Glen Miller song, the refurbished Choo-Choo served as a hotel with sleeping cars which functioned as sleeping quarters.<sup>76</sup> (See figure 13)

Though some private investors demonstrated a willingness to preserve Chattanooga's heritage, city officials looked to the future and worked to improve Chattanooga's image. In 1969, the U.S. Department of Health listed Chattanooga as the highest ranked city in the country in terms of pollution—number one in air pollution and second to Los Angeles in ground-level in ozone. Complaints from citizen's groups and pressure from the Chattanooga–North Hamilton County Air Pollution Committee forced local officials to enact stricter air pollution regulations, and reverse the damage caused by years of rampant industrialization. Furthermore, by exhibiting its willingness to listen to and work with the community to make necessary changes which would improve the quality of life in the city and surrounding area, the Chattanooga Chamber of Commerce displayed the attributes required to accomplish the “Sustainable Chattanooga” project.<sup>77</sup>

Developed by the non-profit organization, Chattanooga Venture, Sustainable Chattanooga was a community effort which received additional support from local groups such as the Chattanooga Neighborhood Enterprise, Partners for Academic Excellence, RiverCity Company, and the Tennessee Aquarium Task Force.<sup>78</sup> Formed in 1984, Chattanooga Venture organized community groups and sought participation for local citizens as it formulated a long-

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<sup>76</sup> James W. Livingwood, *Chattanooga: An Illustrated History* (Woodlands, CA: Windsor Publications, 1980), 133-34; “The Hotel,” <http://choochoo.com/thehotel.php?dest=65#nogo>, (accessed 16 October 2008).

<sup>77</sup> Mary E. Rogge, “Toxic Risk, Community Resilience, and Social Justice in Chattanooga, Tennessee,” in *Sustainable Community Development : Studies in Economic Environmental , and Cultural Revitalization*, ed. Marie D. Hoff (Boca Raton, FL: Lewis Publishers, 2000), 107-108.

<sup>78</sup> “Best Practice: Chattanooga Venture/Community Vision,” [http://www.bmpcoe.org/bestpractices/internal/chatt/chatt\\_8.html](http://www.bmpcoe.org/bestpractices/internal/chatt/chatt_8.html), (accessed 16 October 2008).

term project suggesting what Chattanooga should be like in the future. With the help of 1,700 contributors and a “can do” attitude, Chattanooga Venture drafted “Vision 2000” over a 20-week period. The extensive report provided 40 new goals for revitalizing the city, among which were improved parks, renovations to existing historic properties, and the construction of the Tennessee Riverwalk and Aquarium.<sup>79</sup>

Recognizing the value of the Tennessee River, developers centered Chattanooga’s future on the waterfront. According to Mayor Gene Roberts, the Tennessee River “gives Chattanooga its economic muscle.”<sup>80</sup> After assigning a committee known as the Moccasin Bend Task Force to draft plans for redeveloping Chattanooga’s waterfront, the RiverCity Company was established to oversee construction of parks, walkways, a pier, and the \$30 million aquarium. The results of Vision 2000 provided Chattanooga with over 200 projects and programs, over 1,300 full-time jobs, and 7,300 temporary construction positions. Additionally, the growth and development produced by Vision 2000 generated almost \$800 million in revenue for the city.<sup>81</sup>

In an article addressing the ethical dilemmas of Chattanooga’s approach to revitalization, Hugh Bartling and Don Ferris argue that in planning for the future, the radical approach incorporated by Chattanooga Venture and its partners contributed to the destruction of portions of the city. While development efforts focused on rejuvenating the local economy and increasing tourism, Bartling and Ferris question whether the destruction of sections of the city served only to create new recreational space for middle-class whites and whether the conditions which led to

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., Rogge, “Toxic Risk, Community Resilience, and Social Justice in Chattanooga, Tennessee,” 108-09; David Pendered, “The Power of Fish-Chattanooga’s Aquarium Anchors 20-years Effort to Save Downtown,” *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 24 April 2005, A1.

<sup>80</sup> Thomas L. Waite, “Focus: Chattanooga; A New Look Plus Jobs on the River,” *New York Times*, 24 April 1988.

<sup>81</sup> Sustainable Communities Network Case Studies, “Chattanooga, A City Worth Watching,” [http://www.sustainable.org/casestudies/tennessee/TN\\_af\\_chattanooga.html](http://www.sustainable.org/casestudies/tennessee/TN_af_chattanooga.html) (accessed 16 October 2008); “Best Practice: Chattanooga Venture/Community Vision,” [http://www.bmpcoe.org/bestpractices/internal/chatt/chatt\\_8.html](http://www.bmpcoe.org/bestpractices/internal/chatt/chatt_8.html), (accessed 16 October 2008).

urban decline were properly addressed.<sup>82</sup> Dissecting the ambitious efforts of Chattanooga's elected officials and business elite, Bartling and Ferris indicate how politics and connections played a strong role in the development of the city's waterfront. Among the members of the Riverwalk Corporation were "specific state legislators, business leaders, city and county officers and 'one representative from the black community not [yet] chosen.'"<sup>83</sup> Though the efforts of Chattanooga Venture and its affiliates brought financial reward to the city, there was still concern about the lack of legitimate community involvement in the city's revitalization process.

Mobile, Alabama was another city which underwent a dramatic revitalization process between 1970 and 1990. Similar to Wilmington, Mobile's economy flourished in the early 1940s, with the increasing demand for labor in shipyards. Following the passage of the National Defense Act of 1940, Mobile experienced an economic boom, and the city's population increased by 75 percent between 1940 and 1944 as workers migrated to Mobile, seeking new job opportunities at shipyards such as the Alabama Dry Dock Shipbuilding Company and the Gulf Shipbuilding Company. With links to the Ingalls Irons Works and the Tennessee Coal Iron and Railway Company, Mobile's economy benefited from both shipping and shipbuilding. The addition of Mobile Air Service Command at Brookley Field fueled the increasing war-time population, making Mobile the "most congested urban area in the United States."<sup>84</sup>

The end of World War II brought Mobile's booming economy to a standstill. In a city where the labor force mushroomed by almost 50,000 in five years, shipyards began laying off workers at an accelerated pace. At its peak in 1943, the shipyards in Mobile employed

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<sup>82</sup> Hugh Bartling and Don Ferris, "Chattanooga: Is This Sustainable?" <http://www.uky.edu/Classes/PS/776/Projects/chattanooga/chatnga.html>, (accessed 16 October 2008).

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Mary Martha Thomas, "The Mobile Homefront during the Second World War," *Down the Years: Articles on Mobile's History*, ed. Michael Thomason (Mobile, AL: University of Southern Alabama, 2001), 291-92; George Brown Tindall, *The Emergence of the New South, 1913-1945* (Baton Rouge: University of Louisiana Press, 1967), 695.

approximately 43,000 workers, and by 1946, only 8,500 remained. According to Mary Martha Thomas, “The boom years were over and Mobilians turned to the difficult task of insuring economic growth using their wartime experience while preserving the old city’s proud heritage.”<sup>85</sup>

Before a sustained revitalization process could begin, Mobile underwent a period of racial unrest as the Civil Rights Movement heated up in Alabama. Additionally, Mobile faces another economic blow with the closing of Brookley Field Air Force Base in 1969, stripping the city of \$95 million in annual payroll. The loss of the base, compounded with the loss of shipbuilding jobs following World War II, led the city into a recession which lasted through much of the 1970s.<sup>86</sup>

The climate for change would emerge in the mid-1980s as two of Mobile’s largest department stores, Gayfer’s and Zoghby’s closed by 1986. In an effort to save the troubled city, Jack Miller of the Downtown Redevelopment Commission came up with a plan known as the “String of Pearls.” Like Chattanooga’s Vision 2000, the key to the String of Pearls rested on revitalizing Mobile’s waterfront. While the plan called for parks and a Riverwalk, the key to the project was creating a new civic center. Though Mayor Arthur Outlaw was responsible for initiating Mobile’s revitalization process, the burden of restoring and improving Mobile’s aesthetic character fell upon his successor, Mayor Michael C. Dow. Though both mayors supported the revitalization of Mobile, they were in disagreement over the preferred strategies.<sup>87</sup>

During the election of 1989 Outlaw outlined the economic benefits a new convention center would generate for Mobile. Running against Outlaw, Dow argued that development of a

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<sup>85</sup> Thomas, “The Mobile Homefront during the Second World War,” 305.

<sup>86</sup> Michael Thomason, *Mobile: The New History of Alabama's First City* (Tuscaloosa : University of Alabama Press, 2001), 290-296.

<sup>87</sup> Alan Patureau, “Diverging Currents in Mobile-Residents of Backwater Seaport Debate Progress vs. Preservation,” *The Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 5 June 1988, 1H.

convention center would raise taxes—a claim which won him the majority of voters. However, once in office, Jack Miller and the Downtown Redevelopment Commission convinced the skeptical mayor that the convention center was not only viable, but necessary. Named after the man credited with stimulating Mobile’s revitalization effort, the Arthur R. Outlaw Mobile Convention Center was completed in 1993 and featured 317,000 square feet of space.<sup>88</sup> (See figure 14)



Figure 14. The Arthur R. Outlaw Mobile Convention Center in 2004. (Courtesy of Mobile Bay Convention & Visitor’s Bureau.)

Through the success of the String of Pearls project and the renovation of over 300 homes, both Mayor Dow and his predecessor displayed their desire of revitalizing the once-troubled city. To reward their accomplishments, the Denver-based National Civic League named the city as one of the nation’s “All American Cities,” thus exhibiting the 180-degree shift Mobile completed

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid.; “Downtown/Business District,” <http://www.notesonmobile.com/MobileNeighborhoods>, (accessed 16 October 2008); *The Harbinger*, 22 August 2000.

in twenty years.<sup>89</sup> Like Mobile, Wilmington received recognition as an All American City in 1966. Both cities possessed booming economies during World War II because of their shipyards and, like Mobile, Wilmington's designation stemmed from the city's ability to rebound from economic collapse. Wilmington's recovery from the post-war decline derived from the Committee of 100's ability to recruit companies such as Corning, DuPont, and General Electric.

Each city which DARE used as a model possessed at least one similar quality with downtown Wilmington—whether it was the use of historic preservation, economic disasters, or simply the need to revitalize a struggling economy. These cities and organizations vary through the corrective measures they incorporated to overcome their obstacles, and in their overall level of success. Furthermore, each model differs owing to the sheer number of obstacles (be they internal or external forces such as politicians, zoning, or a lack of proper regulation) which deterred the city or organization's progress.

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<sup>89</sup> City of Mobile, Alabama, "Mobile Wins Title of 'All American City'," [http://www.cityofmobile.org/mapsnfacts/all\\_america.php](http://www.cityofmobile.org/mapsnfacts/all_america.php), (accessed 16 October 2008)



## CHAPTER FOUR: EARLY YEARS OF DARE



Figure 15. Independence Mall, located at the intersection of Oleander Road and Independence Boulevard, in 1979. (Star-News Archive, New Hanover Public Library, Wilmington, N.C)

In February 1974, newspapers in Wilmington, North Carolina announced plans for the construction of an indoor shopping mall to be located at the intersection of Oleander Road and Independence Boulevard. (See figure 15) Still recovering from decades of urban renewal projects, public officials in downtown Wilmington recognized the challenge as one which was occurring across the country. In response to the threat, Wilmington's mayor, Ben Halterman, assigned a task force to examine areas of concern within the city's Central Business District and formulate possible solutions which would enable the city to both survive and improve its quality

of life. Ultimately, the Task Force for Revitalization would draft a report which led to the creation of the Downtown Area Revitalization Effort, Inc.<sup>90</sup>

A joint collaboration between Hugh McRae's Oleander Company and the Philadelphia-based Strouse, Greenberg, & Co., construction for the Independence Mall began on the site of the Hanover Shopping Center and increased retail space at the location from 188,000 to 727,000 square feet. While the prospect of both the proposed mall and alterations to sewage and water flow upset local residents living near the site, residents and merchants living in downtown Wilmington had more pressing concerns. Situated approximately three miles from downtown, Independence Mall threatened the city's status as a retail center.<sup>91</sup>

The scenario playing out in Wilmington's CBD mirrored events on a national level as downtown areas across the United States faced the threat of shopping malls in suburbia. Though the history of shopping centers date back to the 1920s and 1930s, with regional shopping centers such as the Country Club Plaza in Kansas City and Highland Park Village in Dallas, a new trend in suburban consumerism emerged in the mid-1950s with the development of the super regional mall, or "mega-mall." Between the 1950s and 1970s, approximately 22,000 shopping centers were built in the suburbs.<sup>92</sup>

One factor in the rapid growth of suburban shopping centers was sprawl itself. As homeowners made the exodus to suburbia, commuting downtown to shop became tedious. To correct this situation while maintaining a strong consumer base, merchants brought the market to suburbia. Initially, quality businesses operating downtown were reluctant to transplant

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<sup>90</sup> *The Hanover Sun*, 20 February 1974.

<sup>91</sup> Bobbie Marcroft, "Independence Mall," *Scene Magazine*, August 1979, 6-11.

<sup>92</sup> Oliver Gillham, *The Limitless City: A Primer for the Urban Sprawl Debate* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2002), 38; Delores Hayden, *Building Suburbia*, 168-170.

themselves, but as Lizabeth Cohen indicates in *A Consumers' Republic*, stores in New York and New Jersey opened branches in suburban shopping centers to follow the population shift.<sup>93</sup>

Among the strongest selling points for malls were features such as an aesthetically pleasing shopping experience for female consumers and an enclosed atmosphere where teens could gather either after school or on weekends. As an indoor collection of stores snuggled away in the suburbs, the mall provided a sense of security for potential consumers. Furthermore, by virtue of being new, malls possessed the appeal of the novel. According to Jackson's *Crabgrass Frontier*, malls "cater exclusively to middle-class tastes and contain no unsavory bars or pornography shops, no threatening-looking characters, no litter, no rain, and no excessive heat or cold."<sup>94</sup> If downtown Wilmington were to retain its residents and businesses, it needed to seek out and remove the insalubrious individuals and enterprises which tarnished the city's reputation. To accomplish this task, city officials needed to identify the weaknesses of downtown Wilmington's Central Business District and develop a plan.

For this purpose, Mayor Ben Halterman created the Task Force on City Core Revitalization in March 1976. Part of Halterman's goal was to build upon the successes of the Historic Wilmington Foundation in the city's Historic District. Additionally, the successful rehabilitation of the Cotton Exchange and Chandler's Wharf demonstrated that preserving historic structures could prove economically beneficial to the city. Recognizing the potential for preservation and adaptive use, Halterman assigned the Task Force to "examine current efforts directed toward preserving and revitalizing downtown" and to "identify the obstacles and

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<sup>93</sup> Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003), 261, 273.

<sup>94</sup> Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, 257-260.

problems associated with these efforts, and determine the real needs for bringing together the various interests in an effective and efficient approach.”<sup>95</sup>

After performing six months of research, the Mayor’s Task Force on City Core Revitalization met with City Council on October 26, 1976 to present its findings. Led by Frederick Willetts, III, the Task Force discussed both the necessity and urgency for the revitalization of downtown Wilmington. Because of growing deterioration of historic buildings, lack of funding, rising inflation and increased pace of urban sprawl, it was essential that the city revitalize and rehabilitate the existing structures downtown. To carry out this mission, the Task Force pressed for a three-year commitment for a proposed Downtown Development Organization—which would later be known as DARE, Inc.<sup>96</sup>

Following an extensive six-month search for an executive director led by Willetts and Roger Frankoff, DARE selected local resident and entrepreneur George H. Schnake. Owner of Tree Frog Records, which operated out of the Cotton Exchange, Schnake had lived in Wilmington for three years before his selection as DARE’s executive director. Prior to moving to Wilmington, Schnake had worked for advertising agencies in New York City. While Schnake served as DARE’s executive director when it made its first renovation loan, he resigned after less than two months due to personal reasons and was replaced by Gene Merritt.<sup>97</sup>

The son of a state congressman, Eugene “Gene” W. Merritt, Jr. was born in Sampson County and received a B.A. in English from Clemson University. After receiving his degree,

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<sup>95</sup> Wilmington, N.C. Mayor’s Task Force on Core Revitalization, *Revitalization in Wilmington/ [a report by the] Mayor’s Task Force for Revitalization in Wilmington*, i.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 14-18; Minutes of the Wilmington City Council, 26 October 1976, file Mayor’s Task Force Report, DIC.

<sup>97</sup> John Meyer, “DARE to make first renovation loan,” *Wilmington Morning Star*, 10 March 1978, 1B, File DARE, Inc.-Up to 1989, Local History Collection, North Carolina Room, New Hanover County Public Library, Wilmington, North Carolina (hereafter cited as LHC); John Meyer, “Report Envisions Thriving Wilmington Waterfront,” *Wilmington Morning Star*, March 8, 1978, 1B, file DARE, Inc.-Up to 1989, LHC; John Meyer, “Downtown Group Has New Director,” *Wilmington Morning Star*, May 23, 1978, 1B, file DARE, Inc.-Up to 1989, LHC.

Merritt taught English for a year and worked for the family business, Merritt-Holland Co., selling welding supplies and industrial gas. Before assuming the position of executive director, Merritt had been a special assistant to the state Secretary of Cultural Resources. Additionally, Merritt was actively involved in downtown Wilmington's revitalization effort since 1975. According to Willetts, Merritt had "close contacts with city and county officials [which would be] helpful." With a history of public relations experience, Merritt worked with Halterman during his mayoral campaigns. Merritt served as DARE's executive director from 1978 to 1982—a period in which downtown Wilmington transformed from a city experiencing decay and neglect to one undergoing a renaissance.<sup>98</sup>

Merritt spent much of his tenure as executive director building upon the points made by the Mayor's Task Force on Core Revitalization. In the Task Force's report, *Revitalization in Wilmington*, the group examined the leading factors which led to the decay of downtown Wilmington. For each case where improvement was required, the Task Force cited the problem, suggested a policy, and then proposed a means of implementation. Ultimately, the leading areas of concern were broken down into four topics—each addressed by a separate committee: funding, aesthetics, rehabilitation, and promotion. These four areas became vital to DARE's *four-point plan*: Administration, Planning and Urban Design, CBD services, and Economic Development. (Three years later the National Trust for Historic Preservation incorporated a similar four-point plan into its Main Street Program, which included points such as Organization, Design, Promotion, and Economic Restructuring.)<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Hannah Mitchell, "Developer Remaking Riverfront," *Wilmington Morning Star*, 12 October 1997, 1E; John Meyer, "Downtown Group Has New Director," LHC.

<sup>99</sup> Wilmington, N.C. Mayor's Task Force on Core Revitalization, *Revitalization in Wilmington/ [a report by the] Mayor's Task Force for Revitalization in Wilmington*, 1-4, 63.

While the roots of the downtown area's problems originated with urban sprawl, further complications stemmed from inflation brought on by the rising cost of oil and the nationwide recession. Economic stagnation decreased city revenue, and contributed to the overall deteriorating conditions of buildings downtown. Additionally, 50 percent of the buildings within the CBD were vacant, and the tax base receded to under \$36 million. As Wilmingtonians worked away from the CBD, consumer dollars which might have been spent downtown were lost to suburban retailers. As the Task Force's report indicates, the abundance of adult-oriented enterprises and the early closing hours of quality businesses caused consumers with children to avoid downtown Wilmington in the evening. The impending construction of Independence Mall made revitalization even more urgent. Just as suburb dwellers would flock to the new mall, downtown entrepreneurs would either be forced to watch their consumer base dwindle or relocate to the shopping center.<sup>100</sup>

Numerous obstacles stood in the way of the CBD retaining businesses and reclaiming the consumer market. According to the Task Force's report, key problems which needed to be addressed included congested traffic and an unwelcoming environment for pedestrians, a lack of adequate parking, poorly maintained streetscapes, empty storefronts, the lack of a waterfront park, and security concerns. Similar to other downtowns across the United States, Wilmington developed a reputation as a center for crime, making it an uninviting environment for local residents and visitors. The Task Force's report emphasized that, as a city which relied heavily on tourist appeal of the local beaches, the downtown needed to be cleaned up. The report suggested, "Neglected, run-down buildings house winos, barren alleys and parking lots connote crime areas,

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 1-4.

and topless joints and pornographic shops indicate an undesirable element visible only downtown.”<sup>101</sup>



Figure 16. The Palace, a topless bar located on the 100 block of Market Street, was one of many adult-oriented businesses operating in Wilmington’s Central Business District in the 1970s. (DARE, Inc., Collection, New Hanover County Public Library, Wilmington, N.C.)

An early demonstration of DARE’s efforts at removing the seedy elements from downtown occurred when the agency purchased the Ahrens building, which housed a topless bar called the Palace. DARE’s purchase of the Ahrens building was an attempt to convince the Palace’s owner, Floyd Henry, to either sell or relocate his business. (See figure 16) Further efforts at cleaning up the city were eased considerably in 1979 when City Council passed a zoning measure which limited where adult establishments could operate. Passed unanimously, the law halted the spread of topless bars and adult bookstores. Adult-oriented businesses had be

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 32-43.

at least 1,000 feet from each other and located in unrestricted commercial zones. Though approximately ten such businesses operated when DARE was established, only three of the businesses survived beyond 1981. Merritt and DARE, removed adult-oriented enterprises from the CBD by purchasing that buildings housed undesirable establishments and then forcing their tenants out of business.<sup>102</sup>

### **Rehabilitating Buildings and Adaptive Use**

Though Mayor Halterman and City Council granted approval for the establishment of DARE, funding of the organization was an issue. Financially strapped, Wilmington could not shoulder the entire cost of supporting the new agency. Additionally, as DARE provided support for the economic growth and stability of local businesses, Halterman and the Task Force believed local industries should contribute financially to the organization. Ultimately, public financing for DARE originated from both the city and county and through Urban Development Action Grants and Community Block Development Grants, which accounted for 60 percent of the organization's funding. The remaining 40 percent of DARE's financing came from private groups and businesses. DARE received annual funding--\$30,000 from the city and \$10,000 from the county. However, the nature of DARE's agreement with the city required that the agency match funding it received from Wilmington with contributions received from private groups and businesses in order to amass its \$70,000 operating budget. Though DARE actively pursued grants, additional financial support from the federal government and the Small Business

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<sup>102</sup> Letter from Gene W. Merritt to Floyd Henry, 14 April 1980, file Beyer, Robert File, DIC; Hanna Mitchell, "Developer Remaking Riverfront," *Wilmington Morning Star*, 12 October 1997, 1H.



Administration further enabled DARE to provide local entrepreneurs with a means of revitalizing their businesses.<sup>103</sup>

Building upon the model the Historic Wilmington Foundation set by renovating properties in the Historic District, DARE utilized its revolving fund to make buildings in the Central Business District financially sustainable. Much of DARE's success correlated to its use of a revolving fund to both stimulate business growth and finance façade restorations. As part of three-loan process available to businesses (with the other two loans available from the SBA and private banks), DARE's revolving loan fund initially provided ten percent of the total loan with a limit initially set at \$5,000.

An early series of loans provided in 1978 focused on businesses located on the first block of Market Street, between Water Street and Front Street. Among the first business owners who applied for loans from DARE in 1978 were Charles and Nelda Illick of PIP Printing and Bob Jenkins of Jenkins Interiors. Setting an example for future property owners in the CBD, these merchants used the monies received from the revolving loan fund to finance renovations to the façades of their respective buildings.<sup>104</sup>

A preservationist and historian, Jenkins purchased a building located on site of the former home of Royal Governor William Tryon, who initially moved to Wilmington in 1765. Close in proximity to the site of a rebellion against the Stamp Act of 1765, Jenkins chose the building specifically because of the area's historical significance. Jenkins offered his views on the rehabilitation of old buildings: "Don't tear it down. Don't change its character. Use it, and use it

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 18-28; "Dare Ask Backing from Downtown Area," *The Hanover Sun*, 7 June 1977, 1, Bill Reaves Collection, North Carolina Room, New Hanover County Public Library, Wilmington, North Carolina (hereafter cited as BRC).

<sup>104</sup> Tetterton, *Lost But Not Forgotten*, 141; John Coggins, "DARE—'to have faith in downtown,'" *Wilmington Star News* (19 August 1979), 1-3B, file DARE, BRC; "Crisis of the 1970s: Questions, Solutions," *Wilmington's 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary*, 74.

creatively.”<sup>105</sup> These ideas of adaptive use reflect DARE’s larger philosophy and approach to creating solutions for downtown Wilmington’s ailments. According to Merritt, “A great deal of our efforts were within the context of economic development and historic preservation...We don’t believe much in tearing buildings down, we like to preserve them.”<sup>106</sup> In the act of preserving of the man-made landscape, and demonstrating how preservation could revitalize a community, Merritt and DARE practiced what Roberta Brandes Gratz defined as urban husbandry.<sup>107</sup>

As an agent of revitalization, DARE rarely purchased buildings, but rather, assisted others who renovated properties in the CBD. DARE provided technical assistance to owners who wished to either purchase or restore their properties. Merritt explained, “We literally went out and solicited people to do things, such as buying buildings and fixing them up.”<sup>108</sup> This recruiting process allowed DARE to provide financial assistance to over 75 renovation projects during its first five years of existence.

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<sup>105</sup> David La Vere, “Walking Preservationist” *Our State* (August 2005), 137.

<sup>106</sup> John Meyer, “Life Returns to Desolate Buildings,” *Wilmington Star-News*, 9 April 1978, file DARE, Inc. Up to 1989, LHC; Deborah Kelly, “DARE Stemmed City’s Decay,” *Wilmington Star News*, 28 June 1982, file DARE, Inc. Up to 1989, LHC.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.

<sup>108</sup> Deborah Kelly, “DARE Stemmed City’s Decay,” *Wilmington Star News*, 28 June 1982, file DARE, Inc. Up to 1989, LHC.

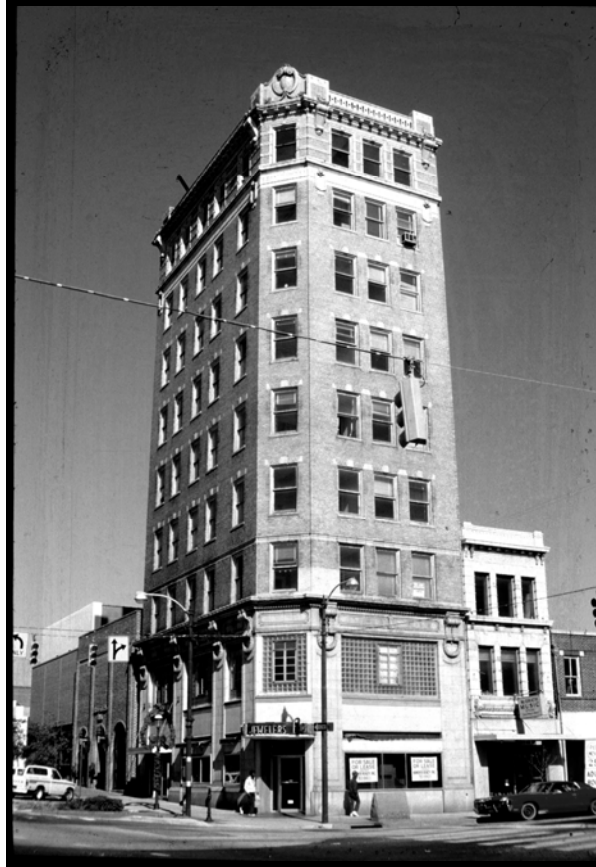


Figure 17. The Trust Building, located at the intersection of Front and Market Streets, after renovations in 1981. (DARE, Inc., Collection, New Hanover County Public Library, Wilmington, N.C.)

In 1980, DARE recruited Henry Sender, president of the National Building Corporation, to purchase and renovate the Trust Building. (See figure 17) Designed by Joseph F. Leitner in the modern French style, and built by Joseph Schad in 1914, the Atlantic Trust & Banking Company Building was, at nine stories, Wilmington's first skyscraper. To insure the preservation of the building's existing architecture, Sender maintained that the restoration effort would take place in accordance with the Historic Landmark Act. Of the estimated \$450,000 in renovations costs, \$75,000 in funding came from low-interest loans available through Wilmington's Urban Development Action Grant. According to releases available from DARE, the renovation effort

also took advantage of credits and benefits stemming from the Tax Reform Act of 1976, which provided incentives to historic preservation.<sup>109</sup>

To promote the rehabilitation of buildings and the revitalization of the CBD, DARE published a bi-monthly newsletter, *Downtown Wilmington* (later known as *Historic Downtown Wilmington* and *The Source*). Originally published in May 1978, *Downtown Wilmington* kept subscribers informed on the status of the agency's mission with briefs which discussed buildings which were under renovation, the status of new businesses in Wilmington's CBD, and news of upcoming social events. Other features in *Downtown Wilmington* included articles on preservation methods, news of awards and grants the organization had received, and a list of properties available in the CBD. Pressing for the economic viability of adaptive use, DARE used *Downtown Wilmington* to explain the differences between adaptive use, restoration, and renovation. The newsletter explained that, unlike the process of restoration, which called for refurbishing a structure to its original, pristine condition, or the process of renovation, which called for upgrading a building's materials while maintaining its original use, "adaptive use was the process by which structurally sound older buildings are developed for economically viable new uses."<sup>110</sup>

An early example of DARE's ability to assist in the process of adaptive use occurred when Belk-Beery vacated its department store in downtown Wilmington and relocated to Independence Mall in 1979. (See figure 18) Followed by J.C. Penny, the exodus of two of the city's largest department stores illustrated the negative impact malls were having on downtown retail.

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<sup>109</sup> Mary M. Gornto, ed. "Renovation Planned for Trust Building," *Historic Downtown Wilmington* 4 vol. 2, file DARE Newsletters, LHC; Wrenn, *An Architectural and Historical Portrait*, 30; file Trust Building, DIC.

<sup>110</sup> Mary M. Gornto, ed., "Restoration, Renovation, or Adaptive Use?," *Downtown Wilmington* 4, file DARE Newsletters, BRC.



Figure 18. The Belk-Beery department store, located at Second and Chestnut Street, became the main branch for the New Hanover County Library through adaptive use. (DARE, Inc., Collection, New Hanover County Public Library, Wilmington, N.C.)

Built at the corner of Second and Chestnut streets in 1946, the Belk-Beery department store housed the first escalator in southeastern North Carolina. Given several vacated department stores, DARE capitalized on the fact that city officials were seeking a new location for the New Hanover County Library. With \$2.6 million set aside towards the construction of a new library, county officials discussed the possibility of building a library in a centralized location accessible to residents living in the suburbs. However, city officials recognized the importance of keeping the public library downtown, where the bulk of county employees worked, and they also expressed concerns about the feasibility of constructing a new building—specifically with regards to both the amount of time and financing which would be required for such a project.<sup>111</sup>

Seizing the opportunity, Gene Merritt and DARE pressed for renovating the recently vacated Belk-Beery department store—a move which would be comparatively inexpensive and

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<sup>111</sup> Minutes 6 March 1978, “Minutes 9/8/1977-7/13-1978,” DIC; Memorandum to Executive Committee, “Retail Business in Downtown,” 15 November 1978, “Executive Committee Correspondence,” DIC; Tetterton, *Lost But Not Forgotten*, 103.

hasten the process of providing the city with a new library. With John Jeffries the architect and Hoyt Galvin of Charlotte brought in as a consultant, the main branch of the New Hanover County Library opened on March 9, 1981, at a final cost to the county of \$3 million.<sup>112</sup>

While it was the agency's mission to improve the quality of life in downtown Wilmington through revitalization, DARE's assistance in rehabilitation projects clearly revealed its preservation-oriented approach. Furthermore, while the organization recruited merchants to open new shops and rehabilitate buildings in the CBD, DARE also emphasized recruiting "quality businesses."<sup>113</sup>

In 1981, DARE participated in a community effort to prevent the Clean Coal Transfer Company from operating in Wilmington. Based in Kentucky, the Clean Coal Transfer Company sought to purchase property once owned by the Atlantic Coast Line. If developed, the proposed facility would have been a setback to DARE's mission. In a letter to the organization's executive committee, Merritt listed reasons why DARE needed to oppose the proposed coal export facility. In addition to citing how surrounding properties such as the Wilmington Hilton, Cotton Exchange, and Cape Fear Technical Institute would be devalued, Merritt contended "[the] proposed coal facility would seriously impact negatively on the future development of downtown Wilmington. Therefore, it is not only DARE's responsibility, but DARE's duty, to become involved in this situation."<sup>114</sup>

The scenario involving Clean Coal Transfer was a rare, but important instance where DARE, as an agency of revitalization, had to decide between supporting a large business which had the potential to increase employment to the CBD, and opposing such a move. By

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<sup>112</sup> Beverly Tetterton, "A Century of Stories: New Hanover County Public Library, 1906-2006 (Part VIII)," <http://www.nhcgov.com/AgnAndDpt/LIBR/Documents/Centennial%20Broadsides/1975-1990.pdf> (accessed 29 August 2008).

<sup>113</sup> Richard K. Reeder to John P. Conners, 18 August, 1981, file Wilmington Cleancoal Transfer, Inc., DIC.

<sup>114</sup> Gene W. Merritt to Executive Committee, 6 July 1981, file Wilmington Cleancoal Transfer, Inc., DIC.

acknowledging the wishes of the community and recognizing the negative long-term consequences, Merritt demonstrated that though DARE sought to improve the economic welfare of the city, the organization would not compromise the future of Wilmington's aesthetic potential by engaging in Faustian bargains.

### **Promoting Downtown Wilmington**

Part of the Task Force on City Core Revitalization's report suggested that Wilmington neglected one of its most commercially-promising qualities: the Cape Fear River. While the Cape Fear River functioned as both a source of shipping and transportation, much of its aesthetic marketing potential remained untapped. The report stated, "[surprisingly], we have turned our backs on the water. The length of South Water Street is filled with neglected warehouses and trash filled lots."<sup>115</sup> In light of what Cotton Exchange and Chandler's Wharf accomplished as retail centers, and their success at utilizing the Cape Fear River as a visual backdrop in particular, the Task Force on City Core Revitalization suggested that city planners promote development centered on the river.

One of the earliest measures taken by DARE to promote the Cape Fear River involved its collaboration with the Wilmington Planning Commission in the development of a welcome center for visitors and a park along the waterfront. While the suggestion for the center and park both appeared in the Task Force's report, planning quickly proceeded the following year, as DARE received over \$900,000 in funding for the projects through an Urban Development Action Grant. Though funding from UDAG projects was available by 1978, construction did not begin until early 1981. Disputes amid members of City Council over financing issues caused frequent

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<sup>115</sup> Wilmington, N.C. Mayor's Task Force on Core Revitalization, *Revitalization in Wilmington/ [a report by the] Mayor's Task Force for Revitalization in Wilmington*, 36.

delays in the development of both the welcome center and park, preventing full completion of the projects until 1987.

In addition to increasing development along the waterfront, other techniques DARE used to promote downtown Wilmington involved event planning and tours. Among the advantages of using these practices were that they drew selectively on the heritage of downtown Wilmington and played upon the city's unique qualities. One of the primary goals was to present downtown Wilmington as a marketplace with a history and demonstrate it had more to offer than the recently developed mall and other competing shopping centers in the region. The storied success of Wilmington's Azalea Festival served as a springboard for much of DARE's event planning.

Established in 1948, the Azalea Festival serves as Wilmington's "premiere event." Prior to closing, the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad brought festival guests such as Ronald Reagan to Wilmington to celebrate the annual event, marking the beginning of spring. After the closing of the railroad, guests of honor such as Bill Cosby, Bob Hope, and Frank Sinatra provided the Azalea Festival with a strong celebrity presence. Between 100,000 to 200,000 visitors attended the festival, making it a strong source of revenue for downtown merchants.<sup>116</sup> Recognizing the potential of the Azalea Festival, DARE assisted the Residents of Old Wilmington, the Lower Cape Fear Historical Society, and the HWF with the planning of additional festivals to mark each season. By 1980, downtown Wilmington held the Azalea Festival in the spring, the Mayfair in the summer, Riverfest in the fall, and Christmas by Candlelight in the winter. Though the Azalea Festival remained the most popular annual event held in downtown Wilmington, the warm reception of Riverfest added a much-needed economic boost.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Holly Roberson, "The Festival at 50," *Wilmington Morning Star*, 10 April 1997, Azalea Festival Pamphlet 5-14, file Azalea Festival 1997, LHC.

<sup>117</sup> Alan Smith, "A Working History of Residents of Old Wilmington (ROW)," [http://www.rowilmington.org/history/working-history-row#Origins\\_and\\_Legacy](http://www.rowilmington.org/history/working-history-row#Origins_and_Legacy), (accessed 1 September 2008).





Figure 19. Makeshift floats participate in a race down the Cape Fear River during Riverfest 1979. (DARE, Inc., Collection, New Hanover County Public Library, Wilmington, N.C.)

Developed as a collaborative community effort by DARE and ROW, Riverfest was an event which capitalized on the region's history. Originally known as the "Old Wilmington Riverfront Celebration," the name of the event changed to Riverfest when planners determined that events should take place on Water Street and focus on the Cape Fear River.<sup>118</sup> Among the events originally featured in Riverfest were a bike race, mini-marathon, regatta, and a creative race involving homemade boats. (See figure 19) For less adventurous visitors, Riverfest provided musical entertainment, clowns, magicians, and arts and crafts exhibits. According to Mary Gornto, planners initially anticipated about 6,000 visitors and were surprised when the numbers surpassed 30,000. Though organizations such as DARE, ROW, HWF, and Wilmington's Chamber of Commerce all partook in the brainstorming process of Riverfest, the

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<sup>118</sup> "Riverfest especially for locals," *Wilmington Morning Star*, 2 October 1981, (Riverfest '81 Supplement) 2, file Riverfest 1979-1982, LHC.

City Council would slowly assume authority as Riverfest became increasingly profitable—to the point where the city sought a copyright for the event’s name.<sup>119</sup>

As was demonstrated by Riverfest, the early success of DARE as an agent of economic revitalization depended upon its ability to cooperate with local historical organizations and maintain good relations. In the case of ROW, as residents of downtown area with strong ties to the community, several members of ROW served on DARE’s board of directors. Other organizations, such as the Historic Wilmington Foundation, Historic District Commission, and Lower Cape Fear Historical Society, also had members who served on DARE’s 36-member board, thus providing the organization with a balance of voices from developers, politicians, entrepreneurs, and preservationists.

Similar to ROW and other groups which had a voice on DARE’s 36-member board was the Downtown Wilmington Association. Representing a collection of merchants in the CBD, the DWA and DARE maintained a strong dialogue in the late-1970s, but the relationship soured briefly in the early 1980s when Merritt criticized entrepreneurs and property owners for their refusal to take risks. While Merritt complained that merchants used outdated sales techniques, he also attacked property owners for allowing their building to deteriorate and appear uninviting to both potential customers and tenants. While Merritt sought to hold downtown property owners and merchants accountable for the state of the CBD, his harsh comments offended the two members of the DWA sitting on DARE’s board of directors, Ann Finkelstein and Albert Rhodes, who subsequently resigned from their positions as the DWA broke away from DARE, claiming they could no longer support the agency. However, in April of 1982, the DWA and DARE reconciled and vowed to support each other in an effort to improve downtown Wilmington’s

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<sup>119</sup> “Riverfest Has Something for Everybody,” *The State*, September 1981, 33, file Riverfest 1979-1982, LHC; Alan Smith, “A Working History of Residents of Old Wilmington (ROW).”

economy. Future progress would not occur with Merritt at the helm of DARE, as he resigned on June 30, 1982. Recognizing that merchants and property owners were reaping the benefits of his work as DARE's executive director, Merritt sought to improve his fortune in commercial real estate development. Merritt's replacement was DARE's assistant, Mary M. Gornto.<sup>120</sup>

### **The Mary Gornto Years**

Born into one of the most prestigious families in Wilmington, Mary Murchison received a B.A. in history from Sweet Briar College in 1969 and later married preservationist G. Deanes Gornto, who later served on the board of directors of the Historic Wilmington Foundation. Related to the Sprunt family, the Murchisons built or owned a number of historic properties in and around Wilmington, including the Murchison Nation Bank Building, First Union Building, the Governor Edward B. Dudley Mansion, and Orton Plantation. Though her critics believed that Mary Gornto's position with DARE came as a result of her family name, she was hired in 1979 following her participation with Wilmington's 1976 Bicentennial Committee.<sup>121</sup>

Previously the assistant executive director of DARE, Mary M. Gornto followed the formula laid out by the Task Force on City Core Revitalization in 1976. At two years, Mary Gornto's brief tenure as DARE's executive director marked a continuation of policies enacted by Gene Merritt, but it additionally demonstrated signs of an organization in transition. Though DARE and Gornto displayed a commitment to rehabilitation efforts in Wilmington's CBD, her tenure also marked the beginning of DARE's growing commitment to development projects.

Though Gornto continued with DARE's business recruiting and rehabilitation efforts, she took

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<sup>120</sup> John Meyer, "City interests investors despite economy," *Wilmington Morning Star*, 23 April 1982, file DARE, Inc. Up to 1989, LIC; John Meyer, "Downtown development director plans to resign," *Wilmington Morning Star*, 15 January 1982, 1B, file DARE, Inc. Up to 1989, LIC; William R Shell to Ann Finkelstein, 22 June 1981, file Executive Committee Meetings: 1978-1984, DIC; Gene W. Merritt, Jr. to Board of Directors, "State of Downtown Wilmington," 10 June 1981, file Executive Committee Meetings: 1978-1984, DIC; Mary M. Gornto, ed. "Merritt to Step Down," *Historic Downtown Wilmington*, (January 1982), file DARE Newsletters, BRC.

<sup>121</sup> Bishir and Southern, *A Guide to the Historic Architecture of East North Carolina*, 243; Beverly Tetterton, local history librarian and historian, interview with the author, 29 October 2008.

additional steps to bolster economic growth by undertaking ambitious projects such as a ferry between the CBD and the U.S.S. *North Carolina* and the construction of a new convention center. In terms of maintaining DARE's commitment to historic preservation in downtown Wilmington, the agency joined Wilmington's Preservation Network and provided assistance in the renovation efforts of one of downtown Wilmington's most historic buildings, the New Hanover County Courthouse.

In the 1970s, two of the biggest draws for Wilmington were the local beaches and the Battleship *North Carolina*. With 225,000 visitors a year, the Task Force acknowledged that "too many tourists flock to see the famous landmark and combine it with a trip to the beach and completely bypass Wilmington."<sup>122</sup> Listed in the report was a recommendation for a stronger link between the Battleship and downtown Wilmington in an effort to reach out to potential visitors. Among the ideas proposed in the report, one which Gornto embraced was the creation of a planned River Taxi.

The River Taxi, as recommended in the Task Force's report, would "operate between the Battleship and the Hilton and/or the Coast Guard dock, possibly...making several stops along the way through the Historic District."<sup>123</sup> Funding for the River Taxi came from DARE, the Cotton Exchange, Chandler's Wharf, and the Hilton. Though Gornto oversaw much of the planning and early stages of development, bureaucratic red tape prevented the River Taxi project from reaching fruition during her tenure. Just as Gornto was instrumental in the planning of River Taxi, she played a key role in the development of the city's convention center.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Wilmington, N.C. Mayor's Task Force on Core Revitalization, *Revitalization in Wilmington/ [a report by the] Mayor's Task Force for Revitalization in Wilmington*, 55-56.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>124</sup> Laura A. Mercer, "River Taxi may operate this summer," *Wilmington Morning Star*, 24 March 1984, 1B, file DARE, Inc. Up to 1989, LHC; Debbie Norton, "River Taxi idea stranded on reef of red tape," *Wilmington Morning Star*, 5 September 1984, 1B, file DARE, Inc. Up to 1989, LHC.

One of DARE's priorities since its conception was the creation of a convention center for downtown Wilmington. Though Merritt was instrumental in early research and the formation of Convention Center Committee, as executive director, Gornto solicited proposals from developers for a new convention center, and after examining potential locations in Wilmington's CBD, surmised that the best location for the project would be at the old site of the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad's depot and warehouses. To assist her in the process of choosing developers and drafting plans for the hotel/convention center, Gornto turned to the Maryland firm, Zuchelli, Hunter, and Associates. Additionally, Gornto established communication with the owners the property, Seaboard Coast Line Railroad, with the intent of buying the land and buildings. Due to a lengthy negotiation process, efforts to purchase and develop the hotel and convention center ultimately fell into the hands of Gornto's successor. Though this venture into adaptive use would not reach fruition for another four years, other projects attempted by DARE demonstrated Gornto's commitment to preservation.<sup>125</sup>

In 1979, the *Wilmington Morning Star* featured an article in which county officials conveyed their dismay over the deteriorating conditions of the New Hanover County Courthouse, and considered constructing a new building. (See figure 20) While the New Hanover County Commissioners agreed the building should be preserved because of its historical significance, judges criticized the poor condition of the structure. Superior Court Judge James Pou Bailey deemed it a "bleeding disgrace."<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Mary M. Gornto to Ralph J. Basile, 13 July 1984, file Hotel/Convention Center Project (1983), DIC; Ralph Basile to Mary M. Gornto, 24 July 1984, file Hotel/Convention Center Project (1983), DIC; Robert T. Murphrey to J. L. Kiesler, 9 November 1984, file Seaboard Coast Line, DIC.

<sup>126</sup> John Meyer, "County Leaders Balk at Remodeling Plan, Eye New Courthouse," *Wilmington Morning Star*, 11 August 1979, 1A, file New Hanover County Courthouse, LHC.



Figure 20. The New Hanover County Courthouse after renovations. (Star-News Archive, New Hanover Public Library, Wilmington, N.C.)

Recognized for its architectural and historical significance, the New Hanover County Courthouse was built in the High Victorian Gothic style in 1892 by A. S. Eichberg of Savannah, Georgia . However, county commissioners felt that such notice did not warrant the \$530,000 in renovation costs. Yet in 1983, the New Hanover County Board of Commissioners created a task force to “review [the] current status of the New Hanover County Courthouse and its relative function with the central business district....and make a recommendation concerning the future of that facility.”<sup>127</sup> Representatives of the City of Wilmington, Historic Wilmington Foundation,

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<sup>127</sup> “Courthouse Development Task Force,” file Courthouse Building, DIC

Chamber of Commerce, County Commission, DARE, and a Citizen at Large were included on the eight-member task force.<sup>128</sup>

With the assistance of Gene Merritt's development agency, the Courthouse Development Task Force recommended that ownership of the courthouse be retained by New Hanover County, and that the building be redeveloped into an office complex comprising a visitors center and space for public and private agencies such as DARE and the Committee of 100. Additionally, the Task Force called for the construction of a parking facility to ease the growing demand for parking in downtown Wilmington. Though New Hanover County retained ownership of the courthouse, and while the county planners followed through with the much-needed renovations to the historic government building, the county did not incorporate other recommendations such as the call for a parking facility and the Task Force's suggested uses of the courthouse.<sup>129</sup>

Though renovations to the New Hanover County Courthouse were not completed until 1988, the Courthouse Development Task Force's ability to come together and preserve a historic landmark demonstrated the impact of communication and teamwork. In the matter of preservation, communication was particularly troublesome for Wilmington due to the number of historic and preservation-related organizations which existed in the city. On February 14, 1984, City Council created the Mayor's Task Force for Historic Preservation to resolve issues which hindered the city's ability to properly practice historic preservation. Among the ten groups invited to participate in the task force were the Historic Wilmington Foundation, Historic District Commission, Lower Cape Fear Historical Society, Residents of Old Wilmington, New Hanover County Museum, New Hanover County Public Library, City of Wilmington, University of North

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<sup>128</sup> Katherine Howell to Cecile Richman, 18 October 1973, file New Hanover County Courtroom, LHC; Tony Wrenn, *An Architectural and Historical Portrait*, 72.

<sup>129</sup> Gene W. Merritt, Jr. to George F. Cooper, 7 February 1983, file Courthouse Building, DIC; "Synopsis of Courthouse Development Task Force Meeting of May 26, 1983," file Courthouse Building, DIC; Gary Cannon to Courthouse Development Task Force, 26 October 1983, file Courthouse Building, DIC.

Carolina at Wilmington, Wilmington Homeowners Association, and DARE. The Task Force determined that the city officials needed to “clarify the City’s preservation objectives and policy in preservation matters in conjunction with the private groups.”<sup>130</sup> Additionally, due to the lack of communication, there needed to be an improved coordination amongst the involved organizations. To fulfill this necessity, the Task Force recommended the creation of a Preservation Network.<sup>131</sup>

As a participant in the Mayor’s Task Force for Historic Preservation, Gornto’s role conflicted with her work at DARE where, in addition to promoting preservation, she focused on improving the quality of life in downtown Wilmington through the development of land and recruiting new businesses. However, the completion of such projects would have to wait, as Gornto resigned as DARE’s executive director to become New Hanover County’s assistant county manager. Like Gornto, her successor would have previous experience as a member of DARE. Unlike Gornto, Bob Murphrey would take the agency in a new direction.

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<sup>130</sup> Mayor’s Task Force for Historic Preservation, *Report from the Mayor’s Task Force for Historic Preservation*, (Wilmington, NC: Mayor’s Task Force for Historic Preservation: 1985), 10.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 9-11.



## CHAPTER FIVE: THE TRANSITION FROM PRESERVATION TO DEVELOPMENT

When Mary M. Gornto left the DARE Inc. to become New Hanover County's assistant county manager, DARE selected Robert T. Murphrey from a pool of fifty applicants as the agency's next executive director. A native of Washington, North Carolina, Murphrey received a B.S. in secondary education from East Carolina University and a license in real estate from Cape Fear Community College. Previously the vice-president of Commercial Realty Co., Murphrey served on DARE's board of directors for two years before being elected as the organization's president for 1983-1984. As the new executive director, Murphrey's business-oriented practices differed slightly from those his predecessors. While Gene Merritt and Mary Gornto emphasized the practice of preservation methods to revitalize downtown Wilmington, Murphrey expanded upon their efforts and gradually took DARE into a direction which embraced development.<sup>132</sup>

While the gradual shift from preservation to economic development occurred during Murphrey's tenure, it is important to note that external forces on a national scale were also a factor in this transition. In the 1970s, both the recession and tax incentives made the rehabilitation of older properties not only economically feasible, but practical for struggling building owners. When Ronald Reagan became president in 1981, he altered the way in which the government operated. Appealing to the self-interest of the public, Reagan sought to improve the U.S. economy by decreasing taxes through cuts to federal programs. In addition to promoting a smaller government, Reagan pressed for increased consumerism—seeking economic prosperity above social rights. This dramatic turnaround in the executive branch had an effect on all levels

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<sup>132</sup> Debbie Norton, "Murphrey is Named Director of DARE," *Wilmington Star News*, 15 October 1984, 1D, file DARE, Inc. Up to 1989, LHC.

of government—shifting the public mentality from conserve to consume. Not surprisingly, DARE embraced this new consume-and-develop mindset.<sup>133</sup>

In an interview following the announcement of his hiring, Murphrey discussed DARE's previous success and his intentions for the future of the agency. In the interview, Murphrey suggested that DARE had three jobs: to stabilize the tax base for downtown Wilmington (which DARE had successfully increased from \$35 million to \$60 million), create new jobs downtown (500 new jobs were created during DARE's first seven years), and to reverse the decay of downtown architecture (over 100 renovations were completed by 1985). When asked about his plans for the future and where he wanted to take the organization, Murphrey focused on business and economics. "The only goal I have, and I think DARE has, is to get out of the downtown revitalization business, to get downtown to the point where they don't need us anymore."<sup>134</sup> In *Historic Downtown Wilmington*, Murphrey said that, in addition to addressing the city's existing needs, he wanted "to focus on a major development project that will significantly impact the revitalization effort."<sup>135</sup>

Though Murphrey sought to expand DARE's business recruiting capabilities, another priority for the new executive director was the successful completion of unfinished projects which remained from previous administrations. At the top of Murphrey's list were the River Taxi project and the long-sought convention center. While much of the planning and development of the River Taxi project occurred during Gornto's tenure, it became fully operational during Murphrey's first year. Using the *Capt. J. Maffitt* as a ferry, the River Taxi project shuttled

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<sup>133</sup> Gil Troy, *Morning in America: How Ronald Reagan Invented the 1980s* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005), 142-43; Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic*, 395; Mike Wallace, "Preserving the Past: A History of Historic Preservation in the United States," 178.

<sup>134</sup> Debbie Norton, "DARE Director Likes Momentum," *Wilmington Star News*, 22 October 1984, 1D, file DARE, Inc. Up to 1989, LHC.

<sup>135</sup> Judith R. Gibson, "Murphrey Elected President," *Historic Downtown Wilmington* 1 vol. 6 (August 1983), file DARE Newsletters, LHC.

visitors between downtown Wilmington and the Battleship *North Carolina* at the cost of 50 cents per trip. (See figure 21) Because of its low price, the River Taxi operated with a heavy deficit of over \$20,000 per year, and immediately received criticism from local merchants and residents about its feasibility. Defending the project, Murphrey argued that the River Taxi provided both foot traffic and additional income for merchants in downtown Wilmington. In November 1985, the River Taxi Tourism Committee met and determined “the River Taxi service was valuable and should be continued.”<sup>136</sup>

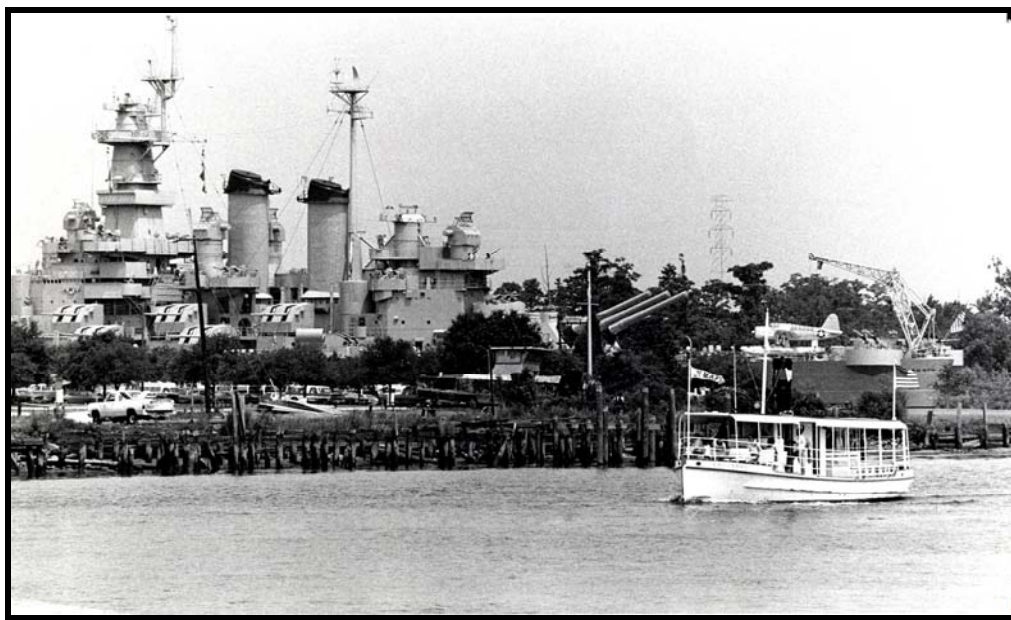


Figure 21. The Capt. J. Maffitt, ferrying visitors across the Cape Fear River. (Star-News Archive, New Hanover Public Library, Wilmington, N.C.)

By making the River Taxi operational, DARE fulfilled another recommendation suggested in the Task Force on City Core Revitalization’s report, and executive committee members of DARE believed the agency was a success which had lived up to its original goals. A defining moment came during a meeting of the executive committee, as Frederick Willetts and William Shell discussed DARE’s future objectives. Identifying the organization’s role in the

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<sup>136</sup> River Taxi/Tourism Committee Minutes, 13 November 1985, file River Taxi Tourism Committee, DIC.

CBD, Willetts viewed DARE as a manager of downtown Wilmington. Expanding on Willetts' observations Shell "hoped that DARE would be more of an entrepreneur and developer in the future."<sup>137</sup> In connecting Shell's thoughts with Murphrey's initial goals when he assumed the mantle of executive director, DARE was becoming increasingly business-oriented. However, there was still one major project which needed to reach fruition.

### **Coast Line Convention Center**

Though the Task Force for Revitalization made a recommendation for a civic center in its report in 1976, the City's pursuit of a convention center in downtown Wilmington date to 1939, when both the city's Chamber of Commerce and Junior Chamber of Commerce undertook feasibility studies. Additional studies in 1974, 1982, and 1984 added more weight to the argument that a convention center would ultimately prove beneficial to downtown Wilmington's economy. The studies suggested that if a new convention center existed in downtown Wilmington, attendance would increase by approximately 13,000 to 19,000 attendees, and both visitors and exhibitors would spend a potential \$3.7 to \$4.5 million dollars on local goods and services. Additionally, the studies added that the construction of a convention center would in turn lead to new jobs for both skilled and unskilled workers and increase the tax base in the CBD.<sup>138</sup>

While the Task Force for Revitalization made recommendations for a new convention center, DARE did not aggressively pursue such an undertaking until 1981, when the agency proposed an annex to the Hilton hotel. While the Hilton hotel/convention center annex proposal circulated for a few years, the plan received alterations when Mary Gornto became executive

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<sup>137</sup> DARE Executive Committee Meeting Minutes, 11 July 1985, file Minutes 7/11/1985 to 10/10/1985, DIC.

<sup>138</sup> Wilmington, N.C. Mayor's Task Force on Core Revitalization, *Revitalization in Wilmington/ [a report by the] Mayor's Task Force for Revitalization in Wilmington*, 58-60; DARE, Inc., *Coast Line Convention Center Proposal*, file Coast Line Convention Center, DIC.

director. Though Gornto and DARE still wanted the proposed convention center to utilize the aesthetic qualities of Wilmington's waterfront, they shifted the proposed location 1000 feet north to the site of the Seaboard Coast Line's depot.

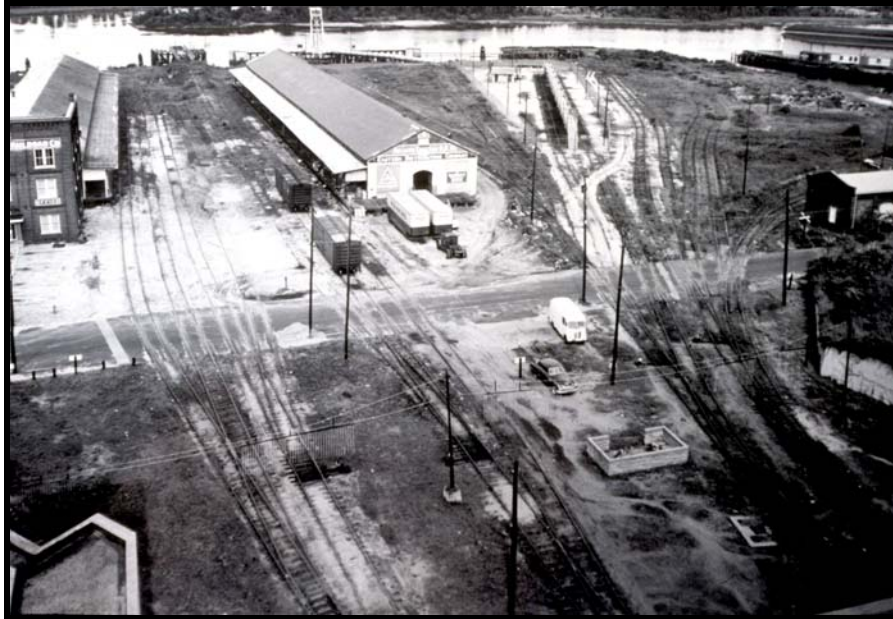


Figure 22. The Atlantic Coast Line warehouses in the 1970s. (Star-News Archive, New Hanover Public Library, Wilmington, N.C.)



Figure 23. The Atlantic Coast Line Convention Center in 2008. (Photograph by author.)

Owned by the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad prior to its merger with Seaboard, the depot (also known as Warehouse A and Warehouse B) contained two of the three remaining structures from the Atlantic Coast Line's legacy in Wilmington. (See Figure 22) Because of its historical significance, the freight warehouses appeared on the National Register of Historic Places. Though Seaboard owned the property and used it up until 1973, the site had potential buyers, ranging from the Historic Wilmington Foundation's founder, Thomas H. Wright, Jr. in 1979, to Kentucky's Clean Coal Transfer Company in 1981. As a preservationist, Wright's interest in the property stemmed from news that Seaboard planned to demolish the historic property. When Seaboard gave notification of its intent to demolish the property in August 1979, the North Carolina Division of Archives and History attempted to intervene by relaying news of the opportunities available through the Tax Reform Act of 1976. Unfortunately, Seaboard's plans remained unaltered and by 1980, Seaboard drafted and signed a demolition contract. Recognizing the property as a "rare symbol of Wilmington's important economic ties with the railroad," the HWF intervened and quickly gathered \$4,000 in donations to purchase the demolition contract and allow time for rehabilitation of the property.<sup>139</sup>

Warehouses A and B received a stay of execution with the Wright's Chemical Corporation, Historic Wilmington Foundation, Southeastern Millwork, Inc. and the Wilmington Railroad Museum Foundation becoming lessees on the property. Founded in 1978 by Hazel Morse, Marguerite James, and Gerda Wootten, the Wilmington Railroad Museum was initially located at the Dudley Mansion on South Front Street. In 1983, to honor the museum's efforts at educating the public, Seaboard donated a caboose and provided furnished space on the

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<sup>139</sup> Carol Gunter to Keith N. Morgan, 3 August 1979, file Seaboard Coast Line, DIC; Larry E. Tise to A. Paul Funkhouser, 8, August 1979, file Seaboard Coast Line Railroad; Thomas H. Wright to James C. Pickett, 2 October 1979, file Seaboard Coast Line, DICB.R. Straton to Mary M. Gornto, 30 March 1984, file Seaboard Coast Line Railroad, DIC;

warehouse property.<sup>140</sup> A month later, after soliciting ideas for a new convention center, Mary Gornto wrote a letter to Seaboard initiating the deal which would lead to the purchase of the warehouse property. In it, she wrote, “The renovation and re-use of the warehouse would give our project a uniqueness which most hotel-meeting facilities do not have.”<sup>141</sup> While talks began in late 1983 under Gornto, completion of the deal occurred four years later under Murphrey.

The delay in finalizing the purchase of the old Atlantic Coast Line warehouse property was caused by the uncertain status of the Wilmington Railroad Museum. In correspondence between DARE and Seaboard, Murphrey and DARE’s president, Michael Creed, sought to ease the concerns of Seaboard’s assistant vice president of real estate, J. L. Kiesler. Between 1984 and 1985, Murphrey gave Kiesler numerous reassurances that DARE would make every effort to honor the existing leases and keep the Railroad Museum in the proposed development, but warned of the need for flexibility and that changes were possible. For Kiesler and Seaboard, the sale of the property could not proceed unless DARE guaranteed the survival of the Railroad Museum via a written assurance.<sup>142</sup>

In a letter addressed to Kiesler, Murphrey wrote,

DARE’s leadership comes from a wide-cross-section of our community including the Chamber of Commerce, the Merchants Association, the Committee of 100, the Historic Wilmington Foundation, elected City and County officials, financial institutions, engineers, architects, attorneys, and other citizens who care about and are dedicated to the revitalization of downtown Wilmington. These board members have recognized the revitalization potential of the railroad property.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> Rebecca Lentz, “Museum Founders Honored,” *Wilmington Morning Star*, 4 March 1999, 2B.

<sup>141</sup> Agreement of Assignment between Seaboard System Railroad, Inc. and Downtown Area Revitalization Effort, Inc., 23 May 1986, Seaboard Coast Line, DIC; Mary M. Gornto to Peter B. Ruffin, 2 December 1983, Seaboard Coast Line, DIC.

<sup>142</sup> Robert T. Murphrey to J. L. Kiesler, 9 November 1984, file Seaboard Coast Line Railroad, DIC; J. L. Kiesler to Robert T. Murphrey, 25 June, file Seaboard Coast Line Railroad, DIC

<sup>143</sup> Robert T. Murphrey to J. L. Kiesler, 25 October 1985, file Seaboard Coast Line Railroad, DIC

To accommodate both the museum and Seaboard, DARE agreed to a contract which granted the museum a 20-year lease on the property fixed at \$200 per month, with a provision allowing the museum to sign into another 20-year contract if it so desired. Additionally, DARE promised to donate \$20,000 to the museum upon approval of the deal and \$10,000 the following year—all of which would be used to pay for museum employees.<sup>144</sup>

Upon reaching agreement with Seaboard in 1986, DARE purchased warehouses A and B for approximately \$200,000. Successfully incorporating adaptive use to celebrate Wilmington's past and fulfill the city's need for a convention center, the Coast Line Convention Center was the result of eight years of work, dating back to the preservation efforts of Thomas H. Wright, Jr. and the HWF and the rehabilitation efforts of Mary Gornto and Bob Murphrey. (See figure 23) As renovations on the convention center neared completion, producers inquired with DARE about the possibility of shooting a film, *Track 29*, on location in the warehouses. Though DARE and the Committee of 100 both worked to promote economic growth, fate intervened in the early 1980s, when the film industry latched on to Wilmington.<sup>145</sup>

### **Hollywood East in Downtown Wilmington**

The origins of the film industry in Wilmington date to 1983 with the production of the movie, *Firestarter*. Looking for a house to represent the antebellum Southern mansion featured in Steven King's novel, Frank Capra, Jr. saw Orton Plantation on the cover of an issue of *Southern Accents*. (See figure 24) After a meeting with the plantation's co-owners, Kenneth and Lawrence Sprunt, Capra and Dino De Laurentiis decided to shoot the film on location in

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> See Deed, file Seaboard Coast Line Railroad, DIC



Wilmington and neighboring Brunswick County. According to Capra, “Had Orton Plantation been a hundred miles up or down the coast, that’s where we’d be.”<sup>146</sup>



Figure 24. Orton Plantation precipitated the birth of Wilmington’s film industry. (Star-News Archive, New Hanover Public Library, Wilmington, N.C.)

With a budget of \$17 million, *Firestarter* pumped \$5 million into Wilmington’s economy. Both De Laurentiis and Capra became interested in building a movie studio in the region. While De Laurentiis saw Wilmington as a viable location, Charleston, with a similar landscape rich in historically significant architecture, was another possibility. Vying for De Laurentiis’s attention, the Committee of 100 and local banks offered financial backing in an effort to outbid Charleston. Upon reaching an agreement to build in Wilmington, De Laurentiis constructed a \$1.5 million film studio called the De Laurentiis Entertainment Group. At the time,

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<sup>146</sup> Amy Hotz and Ben Steelman, “Wilmington Film Icon Frank Capra Jr. Dies at Age 73,” *Wilmington Morning Star*, 20 December 2007, 1A, file Capra, Frank, Jr., Film Collection, North Carolina Room, New Hanover County Public Library, Wilmington, North Carolina (hereafter cited as WFC); Paul Jennewein, “Film Company Will Pump \$5 Million Into City’s Economy,” *Wilmington Morning Star*, 7 August 1983, 4B, file *Firestarter*, WFC; Debbie Norton and Patty Morgan, “City Loves Publicity from Movie Victory,” *Wilmington Morning Star*, 17 December 1983; file Studio-Screen Gems, WFC.

Wilmington's city manager, Bill Farris said, "I think the community will benefit from the publicity...and the fact we were selected in the end."<sup>147</sup>

In *Profiting from the Past*, Donovan Rypkema interviewed the Director of the North Carolina Film Office, Bill Arnold. According to Arnold, between 1980 and 1997, 360 films were made in North Carolina, providing the state with \$4.6 billion in revenue. The primary reason for the state's growth as a source for filming locations was its variety of buildings and landscapes related to different time periods. "One movie shot in Wilmington was supposed to represent California in the 1950s," Rypkema explained, "but they couldn't shoot it in the real California because it's so overdeveloped."<sup>148</sup>

The film industry in Wilmington, and indeed, the state of North Carolina, blossomed throughout the 1980s. In addition to producing *Firestarter*, films such as *Blue Velvet* and *The Crow* and television shows such as *Matlock*, *American Gothic*, and, beginning in 1998, *Dawson's Creek* were also shot on location on the streets of downtown Wilmington. As production increased in Wilmington, local businesses benefitted from the visits of curious tourists who were interested in seeing locations where their favorite movies and stars were filmed. For a city which once relied on the appeal of its heritage to lure visitors, the draw of the film industry was an unanticipated, but welcomed boon.

To coordinate filming downtown, the City of Wilmington established the Downtown Business and Film Location Task Force. Consisting of thirteen members representing city government, local businesses, the film industry, and the Wilmington Film Commission, the primary responsibility of the task force was to draft the city's film guidelines. Assigned as the

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<sup>147</sup> Debbie Norton and Patty Morgan, "City Loves Publicity from Movie Victory," *Wilmington Morning Star*, 17 December 1983, file Studio-Screen Gems, WFC.

<sup>148</sup> Donovan Rypkema, *Profiting from the Past: The Impact of Historic Preservation on the North Carolina Economy* (Raleigh, NC: Preservation North Carolina, 1997), 23-24.

task force's Member At Large, Robert Murphrey was DARE's voice on the task force. Among the major issues the task force faced in drafting the film guidelines included parking, filming hours, noise restrictions, littering, application procedures, and insurance and liability fees. In *Preservation Information* Murphrey acknowledged that while local merchants felt that filmmakers infringed upon their right to do business, the new guidelines were ideal for other historic cities with film industries.<sup>149</sup>



Figure 25. The Masonic Temple Building undergoing renovations in 1992. (Star-News Archive, New Hanover Public Library, Wilmington, N.C.)

The actor, Dennis Hopper, who starred in *Blue Velvet* in 1986 and *Super Mario Bros.* in 1992, elected to stay and create an actor's studio. Hopper purchased the Masonic Temple Building on the first block of North Front Street for \$150,000, promising to renovate the property and create the Dennis Hopper Academy of Performing Arts. (See figure 25) Designed

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<sup>149</sup> File Film Task Force, DIC; Amy R. Masterman, "History for Hire: Using Cultural Resources as Film Locations," *Preservation Information* 7 (Washington, D.C.: National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1995), 14.

so that the top two floors of the five-story building would function as Hopper's acting school, Hopper had the third floor renovated to serve as his residence, and the first and second floors were designed for guests and tenants. Despite Hopper's intentions, he did not develop the performing arts facility, and sold much of the renovated Masonic Temple to John Sutton in 1998. A year later, the Masonic Temple became home to condominiums, a coffee shop, theater and a bar—demonstrating the building's easy transition into adaptive use.<sup>150</sup>

Originally designed by Charles McMillen and built by D. Gaetz in 1899, the Mason Temple Building served as a replacement for the older Masonic Temple located at Second and Market Streets.<sup>151</sup> According to William D. Moore, "The Masonic structures Freemasons erected...were designed to hold four distinct sets of ritual spaces in which men were tutored in constructions of masculine identity."<sup>152</sup> Though the Masonic Temple Building lost its original intended purpose, with the initial financial backing of Hopper, the historical property gained new life through adaptive use.

### **Revitalizing the Riverfront**

In *America's New Downtowns*, Larry R. Ford argues about the impact of waterfronts on downtown revitalization. He writes, "they give the downtown a sense of focus and often a sense of history as well as providing attractive settings for evening strolls or major festivals."<sup>153</sup> In the Task Force on City Core Revitalization's report, the Task Force recommended that city planners utilize the Cape Fear River as a selling point for tourists. DARE's efforts to incorporate the Cape

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<sup>150</sup> Mark Robinson, "Renovation Breathes Life Back Into Landmark," *Wilmington Morning Star*, 11 April 1994, 1A, 4A, file Hopper, Dennis, WFC; Kara Chiles, "Hopper Plans to Open Performing Arts Academy Downtown," *Wilmington Morning Star*, 27 April 1994, 1A, file Hopper, Dennis, WFC; Scott Irwin, "Old Masonic Temple: Curtain Rising on a New Downtown Theater," *Wilmington Morning Star*, 27 June 1999, 1D.

<sup>151</sup> "Masonic Temple Building Notes," file Hopper Dennis, DIC

<sup>152</sup> William D. Moore, *Masonic Temples: Freemasonry, Ritual Architecture, and Masculine Archetypes* (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 2006), 1.

<sup>153</sup> Larry R. Ford, *America's New Downtowns: Revitalization or Reinvention?* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 71.

Fear River into its projects were evident through projects such as Riverfest, River Taxi, and the decision to build the convention center along the river. However, DARE also worked with Wilmington's city managers and City Council to redevelop land along the waterfront. In 1979, Gene Merritt applied for and received an UDAG worth 1.1 million dollars. The project called for "laying brick pavement, planting trees, building a ferry landing at the foot of Market Street and creating a playground along the river opposite the U.S. courthouse."<sup>154</sup> Originally scheduled for completion in 1982, downtown Wilmington's waterfront project consisted of Water Street Plaza, Waterfront Park, and Riverwalk.

Unlike other early projects undertaken by DARE officials, the development of the proposed visitors center, or Water Street Plaza, met with early criticism as preservationists argued that the development of the proposed welcome center called for the demolition of a historic building. The John Walker Harper building, or JoWaHa building, became the center of controversy as local citizens debated over its continued existence. On one side, residents and merchants viewed the building as a decaying eyesore, and a potential hazard which threatened to collapse any minute. Conversely, preservationists and members of the HWF suggested that the JoWaHa building was a symbol of Wilmington's maritime history, and could serve as a welcome center once renovated. However, the former location for the offices of the Stone Towing Company was demolished in 1982, and replaced with Water Street Plaza. Like the visitors center, DARE provided assistance to Wilmington's city manager in the development and promotion of Waterfront Park and Riverwalk—two projects which were part of a concentrated effort to embrace the city's surrounding environment.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> John Meyer, "Pavement To Be Removed," *Wilmington Morning Star*, 3B, file Parks-Riverfront Park, LHC.

<sup>155</sup> Tetterton, *Lost But Not Forgotten*, 127-128; Debbi Norton, Park Construction Tests Patience," *Wilmington Morning Star*, 12 October 1981, 1B file Parks-Riverfront Park, LHC; John Meyer, "Should the Tin Building Be Torn Down?," *Wilmington Morning Star*, 24 March 1982, Neighbors 8-9, file JoWaHa Building, LHC.

Though the planning of some projects such as the River Taxi and Waterfront Park traced back to the report by Task Force on City Core Revitalization, ongoing development along Wilmington's waterfront was part of a larger plan drafted in December 1985. Written by the City of Wilmington's Planning and Development Department, the *Redevelopment Plan for the Downtown* expanded upon a previous report, *Wilmington Looks at the River*, by providing long-term planning for improving and promoting Wilmington's CBD. Furthermore, the *Redevelopment Plan for the Downtown* marked the beginning of what Roberta Brandes Gratz defined as project planning.<sup>156</sup> Similar to organizations operating in Chattanooga and Mobile, DARE drafted large plans which aimed at building upon the existing assets in downtown Wilmington. Though the report recommended adaptive use and mixed use in occupied buildings, it also proposed that "infill development and new construction should be encouraged to the fullest extent possible on vacant land and under-utilized land."<sup>157</sup> In this excerpt, the key word is "under-utilized"—a subjective term for historians and preservationists, as it suggests a product, artifact, or building must be commercially productive in order to validate its continued existence. As often is the case, the value of an object varies both from individual to individual, and from time to time. Similar to wine, some objects increase in value as they age, even if they remain under-utilized for a period in history. Among the sections of the city which fell under the designated redevelopment area was the CBD.

Three years after publication of the *Redevelopment Plan for the Downtown*, DARE drafted a new plan building upon the premises established by the former, but with revisions and careful attention to land use. Published by DARE in 1988, CBD 2000 was a plan designed to be

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<sup>156</sup> Gratz and Mintz, *Cities Back from the Edge*, 66-67.

<sup>157</sup> Planning and Development Department, *A Redevelopment Plan for the Downtown* (Wilmington, NC: City of Wilmington, 1985), 6, file Redevelopment Plan, DIC; *Wilmington Looks to the River: A Plan for the Redevelopment of the City's Waterfront* (Wilmington, NC: City of Wilmington, 1982).

the blueprint for the course of development in downtown Wilmington through to 2000. In a report by DARE's Planning, Research, and Urban Design Committee, the goals for 1988-1989 included improvements to traffic flow and parking and a push to change city zoning ordinances which restricted development in the CBD. Traffic flow, which continued to be a problem for downtown Wilmington since the 1970s, became increasingly critical with the impending construction of the proposed Smith-Creek Parkway (later known as Martin Luther King, Jr. Parkway). Traffic which ran into Wilmington via interstate 40 would be able to bypass suburbia and drive directly downtown. While both DARE and downtown area merchants welcomed the bypass, studies suggested that 30,000 to 40,000 daily commuters were more than downtown Wilmington's streets could sustain. To accommodate the parkway and the benefits which it entailed, planners recognized that downtown Wilmington needed to adjust, and in some cases, expand.<sup>158</sup>

In response to concerns regarding the practice of development and expansion in Wilmington's CBD, DARE financed a study titled, *Approaches to Preserving Wilmington's Waterfronts*. Aimed at providing both clarification and solutions, the study examined the pressures of developing sections of downtown Wilmington, while struggling to preserve its historic fabric. One of the hurdles addressed by the study was the varying zoning ordinances between districts—particularly with regards to building height. While structures in the Central Business District and Central Business District-Historic District Overlay did not possess maximum height restrictions, structures in the HDO were protected by a design review process, which the Historic District Commission oversaw. While such oversight protected some buildings of historic significance, it did not protect others. Conversely, while some portions of downtown

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<sup>158</sup> Planning Research, and Urban Design Committee, *CBD 200 Executive Summary* (Wilmington, NC: DARE, Inc., 1988), 3-7, file CBD Services: CBD 2000 (Executive Summary), DIC.

Wilmington were open to unhindered development, several sections remained blocked.

According to the study, “The need for a more consistent zoning ordinance for the waterfront cannot be understated. The loose ends and conflicting restrictions could spell trouble in the years to come.”<sup>159</sup>

In addition to implementing recommendations made in *Approaches to Preserving Wilmington’s Waterfront*, CBD 2000 also called for expanding the scale of projects such as Riverwalk, Riverfront Park, and downtown parking. Furthermore, plans in CBD 2000 recommended the creation of a “major new mixed-use development and support” facility which would serve as a commercial link between the Cotton Exchange and Chandler’s Wharf.<sup>160</sup> Eventually known as the Riverfront Centre, the proposed project eventually became the largest setback in DARE’s history.

According to CBD 2000, one of the prime pieces of real estate near the waterfront was a product of urban renewal, the Water Street parking deck. Though the CBD lacked adequate desirable parking, merchants with stores along Front Street and Market Street complained that the location of the parking deck, which was situated behind numerous stores located on Front Street, was not easily accessible to potential customers. Seeking to remove a strategic mishap and improve the city’s marketable qualities, drafters of CBD 2000 recommended replacing the parking deck with a mixed-use facility to bolster revenues and increase employment in downtown Wilmington. The matter became critical in 1992 when one of the top private employers in downtown Wilmington, Pharmaceutical Product Development, Inc., needed to move to a larger facility to accommodate its growing staff.<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> Matthew A. Stanley, *Approaches to Preserving Wilmington’s Waterfront: Analysis and Recommendations* (Wilmington, NC: DARE, Inc. 1988), 1, 7-9.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>161</sup> *Wilmington Morning Star*, 6 April 1994, file Riverfront Centre, DIC.



To assist PPD in its effort to stay downtown, and to prevent the company from moving to the suburbs, Robert Murphrey and Mary Gornto pressed for the replacement of the Water Street parking deck with the proposed Riverfront Centre. Originally conceived in 1989 as a 50,000 square-foot complex, plans for the Riverfront Centre were revised, increasing the complex's size to over 100,000 square feet. With a proposed budget of \$20 million, the project was, according to Murphrey, "the most dramatic economic boost that downtown has received."<sup>162</sup> Because of the large cost, city officials such as Mayor Don Betz and Finance Director Brent McAbee expressed concern with where the city would acquire the funding to finance construction and maintain daily operations once the complex was completed. While some city officials maintained reservations because of the ramifications development of Riverfront Centre would have on city finances, Murphrey and Gornto, who now served as Wilmington's city manager, emphasized the need for development to both city officials and the public. According to Murphrey, "this kind of opportunity will not come again."<sup>163</sup>

Envisioned as a "new town" the premise behind the Riverfront Centre was that it would serve as a town within a town. Murphrey explained, "It's the new city in the suburbs with the shopping below, the living space above, and the office at the end of the street...we already have the amenities downtown."<sup>164</sup> The self-contained environment, built overlooking the Cape Fear River, would contain 50,000 square feet of retail shopping or office space on the ground floor, 144 condominiums situated over four floors, and a new parking deck with 500 to 1000 spaces. The potential of the Riverfront Centre appealed to many local merchants. The Committee of 100, the Downtown Wilmington Association, and John Bullock, owner of the Cotton Exchange,

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<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.; Brent McAbee to Mary Gornto, 4 April, 1994, file Riverfront Centre, DIC

<sup>164</sup> James Drew, "Wilmington Might Get a 'Second Downtown'," *Wilmington Morning Star*, file Riverfront Centre, DIC.

expressed their support of the project and any effort to keep PPD in downtown Wilmington. As approval mounted for the Riverfront Centre, the final issue which remained was the matter of financing.<sup>165</sup>

In May 1994, city and county managers Mary Gornto and Allen O’Neal offered a series of payment options to PPD’s president, Dr. Fred Eshelman. One payment option discussed featured DARE as the owner/developer of the property which would be built to PPD’s specifications, with PPD leasing the facility in payments which equaled the net debt of construction. Additionally, PPD would be free to purchase the property at any time if it desired ownership. While the proposed deal, complete with a free site, provided PPD with \$1.2 to \$1.5 million in savings, downtown Wilmington faced the same challenge which sparked urban sprawl—property in the suburbs was spacious and inexpensive. With PPD pacing to begin development on a headquarters, city officials debated issues such as the number of parking spaces, the height of the Riverfront Centre, and how much PPD should contribute to construction.<sup>166</sup>

DARE’s efforts to retain PPD and develop the Riverfront Centre became a source of controversy for downtown Wilmington. While some merchants and groups such as the Committee of 100 welcomed DARE’s attempts, organizations like the Residents of Old Wilmington and merchants like Harper Peterson were concerned with the number of concessions DARE and the city were granting to PPD. To stay downtown, Eshelman informed the Riverfront Centre Committee that his planned building would have to be twelve stories tall. Concerned with

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<sup>165</sup> “Riverfront Centre: A Proposal for a Mixed-Use Project on Wilmington’s Downtown Riverfront,” 31 August 1993, file Riverfront Centre, DIC; Robert J. Dunn to Committee of 100 Members, 26 May 1994, file Riverfront Centre, DIC; Dean Gattone to New Hanover County Commissioners, 9 May 1994, file Riverfront Centre, DIC; John Bullock to Hamilton Hicks, 9 May 1994, file Riverfront Centre, DIC.

<sup>166</sup> Bill Kingoff to Wilmington City Council, DARE, Mary Gornto, 29 September 1994, file Riverfront Centre Development Committee, DIC; Charles D. Meier to Mayor Don Betz, 4 October 1994, file Riverfront Centre Development Committee, DIC; Thomas C. Pollard to Fred Eshelman, 6 September 1994, Riverfront Centre Development Committee, DIC.

aesthetics, Peterson felt the building would tower over other structures in the vicinity and damage the historic aspects of downtown Wilmington. Placing pressure on City Council, Peterson later commented, “you start infilling with out-of-context buildings, and I think you would change the character of downtown.”<sup>167</sup>

Because of disagreements over design and financing, Eshelman became increasingly frustrated with City Council’s inability to reach a deal. In mid-October, Eshelman suggested that PPD would be compelled to withdraw from the project if a compromise could not be reached. By November, talks between the City of Wilmington and PPD dissolved, and the company moved its 200 workers out of the city center.<sup>168</sup> Months following the collapse of talks with PPD, the proposed developers of the Riverfront Centre also withdrew from the project. In a position statement written in 1996, Murphrey revealed his frustrations over the collapse of the project. Acknowledging the damage done by the loss of PPD and its workforce, Murphrey emphasized the need to avoid future mishaps by working in an organized, decisive manner—with the support of City Council. Stressing the need to avoid political uncertainty, he wrote, “the suburbs have won another battle to secure the downtown’s place in the economy of the community. Downtown must win the next one!”<sup>169</sup>

Though the Riverfront Centre failed to materialize, efforts by Gene Merritt would later salvage the project. Originally serving as an unofficial consultant and representative during the Riverfront Project, Merritt hoped DARE and the City of Wilmington would select his company to be the developer for the complex. However, when the City of Wilmington decided to solicit

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<sup>167</sup> Philip Hervey, “Councilman Peterson Sees No Conflict of Interest,” *Wilmington Morning Star*, December 1996, 7A, file Peterson, Harper, LHC.

<sup>168</sup> Bettie Fennell, “PPD Tells City It Wants Deal Reached,” *Wilmington Morning Star*, 18 October 1994, 4A, file Riverfront Centre Development Committee, DIC.

<sup>169</sup> Robert M. Murphrey, “Position Statement: Water Street Development Site/Riverfront Center,” 10 July 1996, file Riverfront Centre Development Committee, DIC.

proposals from other developers, Merritt withdrew his company from consideration and his support from the project. In a letter addressed to Gornto, Merritt wrote, “It’s apparent to me that you...think you have some sort of ‘gold mine’ here that is going to create a tremendous amount of interest from the development community. For your sake, I hope you are right.”<sup>170</sup>

While the project fell through, Merritt later began construction on a large mixed-use building on the same property in 2000. Working against City Council and Harper Peterson, who became mayor of Wilmington in 2001, Merritt fought for both construction contracts and permits. Completed in 2002, the Water Street Center was a nine-story, 75,000 square foot building containing 108 rooms. (See figure 26) Costing approximately \$16 million to develop, Merritt disclosed to the City of Wilmington that delays in the project had “come at a significant financial cost to us.”<sup>171</sup> In addition to conveying his frustrations over the lack of financial support from either the city or county, Merritt offered suggestions for future land acquisitions and development which would build upon the progress made by the Water Street Center, and direct downtown Wilmington back in the direction of the Riverfront Center. Initially, Merritt’s next project was renovating St. Andrews Church on Fourth Street, but with tensions growing between Merritt and Peterson during the construction of the Water Street Center, Merritt withdrew his name from consideration.<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> Gene W. Merritt, Jr. to Mary M. Gornto, 7 November 1994, file Riverfront Centre Development Committee, DIC.

<sup>171</sup> Gene Merritt Company, Inc., “Economic Development Report,” 7 May 2002, file Water Street Center, DIC.

<sup>172</sup> Si Cantwell, “Peterson’s Personal Agenda Hurts Wilmington,” *Wilmington Morning Star*, 30 June 2002, 1B; Bettie Fennell, “New Mayor Tried to Delay Some Contracts; Peterson Wanted City Council to Consider Agreement with Developer Gene Merritt,” *Wilmington Morning Star*, 17 December 2001, 1A, 6A.



Figure 26. The Water Street Center, built in 2002 by the Gene Merritt Company. (Photograph by author.)

### **Aftermath and a New Vision of the Future**

For DARE, while loss of PPD and the failure to build the Riverfront Centre were the biggest setbacks the agency encountered, the organization faced further insult when City Council decided to penalize DARE for its inability to successfully complete its goals by decreasing its funding. However, due to pressure stemming from local residents and merchants and a petition pressuring both Mayor Don Betz and City Council, the City of Wilmington restored DARE's budget to its original level. With pressure mounting from both politicians to provide economic development and from local preservation groups to minimize damage to downtown Wilmington's historical landscape, DARE was locked in a delicate game of appeasement.

Murphrey's frustrations concerning the lack of development climaxed in the aftermath of an attempt to develop the Market Street Commons—a new seven-story building on the 100 block of Market Street. The architect, Glen Richardson, went before the Historic District Commission

in November 1996 with plans for an eight-story building, but reduced specifications to appease the HDC. Following a workshop with the HDC, Richardson amended the plans to include a “more pedestrian-scale façade” and décor which would keep the structure in the same theme as the surrounding buildings. In making the alterations, Richardson received early approval from the HDC, and much of the public in attendance welcomed the proposed building. Among those in attendance was John Bullock, who felt that “Wilmington cannot continue to exist without new stimulation.” Frank Conlon, a member of DARE and preservationist, was encouraged by Richardson’s willingness to incorporate changes into his plan. Conlon said, “the Commission has the responsibility to see what we have is compatible with the historic fabric of downtown Wilmington.”<sup>173</sup>

Though there was strong support for Richardson’s proposed building, a few citizens attending the HDC meeting expressed their disapproval. Tom Mitchell, a resident of the Historic District, and Elizabeth Garzarelli, who had an office in the adjacent Trust Building, were concerned about the height and scale of the proposed building—feeling it was in discord with the surrounding historic structures and that it would obstruct views. While members of the Commission took the views of the public into consideration and discussed the building’s scale further, Richardson’s frustration grew, and he explained that he “spent a lot of time and money on drawings” and if the HDC pressed for more changes, then he would need to “start from scratch.”<sup>174</sup>

Rather than revisiting the plan, Richardson scrapped the project, contending that it was too difficult to do business in downtown Wilmington. Frustrated with the City’s inability to

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<sup>173</sup> Historic District Committee Meeting Minutes, 2 December 1996, file HDC Meetings (4/1995-12/1996), DIC.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

develop another building with promise, Murphrey delivered a speech before the HDC in which he expressed his views regarding the condition of downtown Wilmington and its potential.

...More than 250 buildings in the CBD have been renovated, preserved, and thus made available for a new occupancy through adaptive reuse. Few historically significant buildings have been demolished since the early days of urban renewal in the 1960s. And today's downtown is better for it.

But historic preservation does not and cannot alone save or support a downtown business district. If we are to survive economically, we must continue to grow and develop...Downtown Wilmington is not a museum. It is not a Williamsburg. It is not a Disneyland main street. Fortunately, it is a "real" downtown. It meets the test of a 24 hour city, with people living, working, shopping, and visiting around the clock...If it is to remain so, it will need to continue forward progress.<sup>175</sup>

For DARE and Murphrey, progress came in the form of a project under development by the organization's Planning Committee since November 1994. While DARE continued negotiations with PPD on the Riverfront Centre project, the agency began soliciting proposals for "the preparation of a long term strategic downtown development plan for the Central Business District and surrounding neighborhoods."<sup>176</sup> This revised plan would function as an update to the earlier CBD 2000 project and the report from the Task Force on City Core Revitalization. The end result would be Vision 2020.<sup>177</sup>

Formulated with a view of what downtown Wilmington would look like in the year 2020, Vision 2020 was a large-scale plan created by the Savannah-based Cranston, Robertson, & Whitehurst and ICON Architecture, Inc. for DARE and the City of Wilmington. In addition to promoting the preservation of downtown Wilmington's historic resources, Vision 2020 called for increased residential development, expansion of Riverwalk, coordinated growth of Cape Fear Community College's campus, new parking decks, and revisions to the guidelines for downtown development. Furthermore, Vision 2020 suggested that a new convention center would serve as

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<sup>175</sup> Robert M. Murphrey, "HDC Presentation," December 1996, file Speeches, DIC.

<sup>176</sup> DARE, Inc. to Interested Urban Planning Firms, 3 November 1994, file Vision 2020, DIC.

<sup>177</sup> DARE, Inc., Planning Committee, Agenda, 13 November 1994, file Vision 2020, DIC.

the primary stimulus for continued downtown revitalization downtown. For Murphrey, Vision 2020 adhered to DARE's mission in battling urban sprawl and revitalizing downtown Wilmington.<sup>178</sup>

In a speech Murphrey presented before the Commission on Smart Growth, he connected Vision 2020 to smart growth, and acknowledged DARE's efforts at fighting urban sprawl.

Fortunately, here in Wilmington, a new master plan for the downtown area was recently completed. This plan has recognized the role that the central business district plays in the region. Many of the major recommendations in the plan are already underway, including the redevelopment of the Water Street parking garage site; predevelopment planning for a new downtown convention center, and a multi-modal transportation center, and the continued redevelopment of existing buildings in use.<sup>179</sup>

As defined by Oliver Gillham in *The Limitless City*, smart growth is “managed growth that attempts to fulfill the need to provide for growth (both economic and population) while at the same time limiting the undesirable impacts of that growth.”<sup>180</sup> While the plans laid out in Vision 2020 were characteristic of smart growth, the master plan, as a whole, was a departure from the conservative revitalization efforts of DARE's past. However, for matters of sustainability, city officials believed that if downtown Wilmington were to endure economically, it needed to adapt.

To Murphrey, the late-1990s brought a new threat to downtown economies. Like the indoor shopping mall, the proliferation of “big box retailers” like Wal-Mart and Target gave consumers easy access to a wide range of goods in an enclosed environment. For merchants and property owners to prosper, they needed to rely on downtown Wilmington's strengths: its sense of community, history, and its ability to deliver quality products. However, if downtown

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<sup>178</sup> Cranston-ICON-Planning Collaborative, *Wilmington Downtown Plan: Vision 2020* (Wilmington, NC: City of Wilmington, 1997), 3-4; Robert Murphrey to Connie Majure, 19 February 2001, file Speeches, DIC.

<sup>179</sup> Robert Murphrey, “Presentation to Commission on Smart Growth,” 3 April 2000, file Smart Growth, DIC.

<sup>180</sup> Gillham, *The Limitless City*, 156.



Wilmington were to survive, it would be without Murphrey as executive director of DARE.

Leaving in 2001 to become the city manager of Burgaw, Murphrey was replaced temporarily by Gene Merritt until the organization could find a new director to guide it in the twenty-first century.<sup>181</sup>

### **Hamilton Inherits the Mantle**

In August 2001, DARE members selected Susi Hamilton as the full-time replacement for Robert Murphrey, thus relieving Gene Merritt of his temporary duties as the organization's executive director. A former resident of Winston-Salem, Hamilton received a B.A. in history and art history from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 1994. Later, in 2004, she received a master's degree in public administration from the University of North Carolina at Wilmington. She entered the position of executive director of DARE with an understanding of downtown Wilmington and experience in the field of historic preservation. Before assuming duties as executive director, Hamilton worked with the N.C. State Historic Preservation Office as an assistant and she worked in Washington, North Carolina as a historic preservation planner and Main Street manager. As the organization's new director, Hamilton inherited one of DARE's ongoing missions from her predecessors: Vision 2020 and the projects tied to it.<sup>182</sup>

While Hamilton worked with city officials to increase the number of businesses operating in the CBD and improve Wilmington's appeal as a place for business and retail, a power struggle emerged between DARE and Mayor Harper Peterson. A native of Long Island, New York, Peterson studied mezzo-American archeology and received a degree in anthropology from UNC-

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<sup>181</sup> Robert Murphrey, "Presentation to Commission on Smart Growth," 3 April 2000, file Smart Growth, DIC.

<sup>182</sup> Josiah Cantwell, "Downtown Can Help Stem Sprawl, Says New DARE Chief," *Wilmington Morning Star*, 9 August 2001, 1B, file DARE, Inc. 1990-present, LHC.

Chapel Hill in 1970.<sup>183</sup> Upon graduating, Peterson spent two years in Thailand, teaching English. In the early 1980s, Peterson and his wife, Plunkett, started what would be a series of businesses in downtown Wilmington. Having previously served on DARE's board of directors and participated in the organization's revolving fund to purchase the City Market, Peterson questioned the direction in which DARE was going, and through a series of maneuvers, asserted his authority as Wilmington's mayor. In 2001, Peterson fired the city manager, Mary Gornto, despite previous assertions that her position was secure. Questioning the ethics of multiple members of City Council serving on DARE's board, Peterson wrote a letter to DARE's acting president, Donald Britt, encouraging DARE to remove the council members serving on the agency's board. Citing a conflict of interest, Peterson believed that, as an independent development agency, DARE should remain free of political influence. Responding to Peterson's suggestions, Britt commented, "I think that he just doesn't, in spite of what he says, by his actions, he doesn't like DARE very much."<sup>184</sup>

Mayor Peterson demonstrated his apparent contempt towards DARE on numerous occasions between 2001 and 2003. After voting against the return of DARE's loan program, Peterson attempted to assume control of the Vision 2020 plan and remove DARE's administrative assistance on the project. Further evidence of Peterson's antipathy towards DARE appeared during a meeting in which city officials met with individuals interested in bringing a minor league baseball to Wilmington. Before the meeting Peterson invited and then uninvited Hamilton and other DARE officials. Responding to the actions of the mayor, Councilman Jim

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<sup>183</sup> Harper Peterson, former Mayor of Wilmington, North Carolina, interview by Carroll Jones, 24 October 2006, Oral History Collection, William Madison Randall Library, University of North Carolina at Wilmington.

<sup>184</sup> Bettie Fennell, "Mayor Wants Council Members Off Board," *Wilmington Morning Star*, 1 November 2002, 1B, 5B, file DARE, Inc. 1990-present, LHC; Frank Maley, "Concept Was Nothing New, but It Seems to Be Working," *Wilmington Morning Star*, 26 July 1992, 1E; Si Cantwell, "Peterson's Personal Agenda Hurts Wilmington," *Wilmington Morning Star*, 30 June 2002, 1B.

Quinn, a former president of DARE, said, “To me, it is just an example of a personal vendetta he’s got against DARE, and I don’t know why.”<sup>185</sup> In an article in the *Morning Star*, Donald Britt commented on a meeting in which Peterson usurped authority over Vision 2020 from DARE. “Everything he has done as mayor is to damage and destroy what DARE has done for the community.”<sup>186</sup> Richard Engdahl, who previously served as a president of DARE, wrote an editorial in the *Wilmington Morning Star*, lashing out at Peterson’s attempts to “kidnap” Vision 2020 and for allegedly telling Hamilton “that DARE [no] longer has an economic development role for downtown, because the city is taking over that function.”<sup>187</sup>

For Peterson, much of his frustration with DARE stemmed from his beliefs as a preservationist and his standing as a merchant and property owner in Wilmington’s CBD. As DARE pressed for development and growth through project planning and projects like CBD 2000, Vision 2020, and the Riverfront Centre, the historic quality which appealed to preservationists, residents, merchants, and visitors was threatened with the infill during the 1990s. To solve this threat, Peterson took aggressive measures by attempting to remove power from the organizations and individuals he perceived were most destructive. However, each step Peterson took stirred a negative backlash in the media—damaging his reputation with the public. When Peterson ran for reelection in 2003, he was defeated by Spence Broadhurst. Though Peterson claimed he had no regrets, he admitted that firing Gornto and his attack on DARE had hurt his reelection bid. According to Peterson, “I tried to break it up, and I got beat up.”<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> Bettie Fennell, “Mayor Tries to Muscle DARE Aside,” *Wilmington Morning Star*, 26 November 2002, 1B, file DARE, Inc. 1990-present, LHC

<sup>186</sup> Ibid.

<sup>187</sup> Richard Engdahl, “Don’t Dare Disrupt DARE,” *Wilmington Morning Star*, 5 December 2002, 9A, file DARE, Inc. 1990-present, LHC.

<sup>188</sup> Sam Scott, “No Regrets about Time as Mayor,” *Wilmington Morning Star*, 11 October 2003, 1A, 6A.

Despite pressure from the City of Wilmington, Hamilton and DARE continued to serve downtown Wilmington as a business recruiter in fashion similar to the Committee of 100. While the organization did not abandon its practice of promoting preservation and adaptive use of existing buildings, the demand to ensure downtown Wilmington's economic survival forced DARE officials to place more emphasis on results. Ultimately, in January 2004 DARE's board of directors voted to change the organization's name to Wilmington Downtown, Inc. Acknowledging that DARE had accomplished much of its original mission, Hamilton explained the name-change and shift in policy when she said, "it is time to cast a wider net, drawing businesses and residents to downtown."<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> Susi Hamilton, "The Downtown Report: An Update by DARE, Inc. Susi Hamilton," *Encore*, 16-22 July 2003, 12, file DARE, Inc. 1990-present, LHC; Bonnie Eckstein, "Downtown Group, DARE, Changes Name," *Wilmington Morning Star*, 29 January 2004, 2A.

## CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

In the 1970s, the atmosphere of downtown Wilmington conveyed an uninviting message. The combination of blight, crime, and adult-oriented businesses left visitors with a negative impression of the city—one which suggested that the downtown area was best avoided. In addition to a nationwide recession and unemployment issues, the lack of proper regulations and zoning restrictions allowed disreputable businesses to flourish in downtown Wilmington during the 1970s—at the cost of the city’s overall marketing appeal. The most pressing question: to stimulate the economy, does one modernize, preserve, or do a combination of both?

For change to take place, an unanticipated crisis or cataclysmic event must occur. In light of the city’s deteriorating conditions, the development of Independence Mall became a mixed blessing. While Mayor Ben Halterman, City Council, residents, and merchants all perceived the development of the mall as a threat to their livelihoods, it was also a wakeup call for downtown Wilmington which served as a catalyst for revitalization. As news of the mall became public, Halterman and the Task Force on City Core Revitalization assessed the city and its weaknesses in an effort to resuscitate it and protect it from further decay.

For DARE, there are essentially two periods: pre-1985 and post-1985. Another way of breaking down the organization’s history is before Robert Murphrey and after Robert Murphrey. Before Murphrey and before 1985, DARE’s objectives corresponded with the recommendations made by the Task Force on City Core Revitalization in 1976. Though DARE initially practiced an approach similar to the Historic Wilmington Foundation which utilized historic preservation as the springboard for economic revitalization, once downtown Wilmington had sufficiently recuperated to a certain point, DARE altered its approach—focusing less on revitalization and more on development. Records and minutes indicate that this transition began in late 1985, when

DARE's board of directors determined the organization had fulfilled much of its original goals. As DARE's executive directors, the actions of both Gene Merritt and Mary Gornto suggested that they leaned towards urban husbandry and favored building upon the architectural resources which were already present in Wilmington's Central Business District in manner similar to Joe Reaves and Malcolm Murray's Cotton Exchange and Thomas Wright, Jr.'s Chandler's Wharf.

DARE's shift in the 1980s correlated to trends which were occurring on a national scale. Just as Reagan preached the values of consumerism, Robert Murphrey and DARE's board of directors focused more on development and business recruiting. With the drafting of the *Redevelopment Plan* in 1985, the agency demonstrated how it was switching from a conservative role which leaned towards urban husbandry to a position which embraced project planning. Though many longtime residents perceived any dramatic change in the landscape as a threat to the status quo, and though many ardent preservationists fought potential changes, Murphrey demonstrated the ability to balance between the need for preservation and development in a district which struggled to adapt and compete with other cities for business and tourism.

Leading up to its name-change to Wilmington Downtown, Inc., DARE's shift away from revitalization perplexed preservationists. As an organization which promoted tourism and the historic qualities of a city which it helped revitalize, DARE was effectively "killing the goose that laid the golden egg" by switching focus to increased growth and development.<sup>190</sup> However, in addition to possessing some level of historical significance, for an object to be unique, it must also be rare. As Philip Johnson and David Lowenthal both argue, the push for preservation may sometimes prove too potent. According to Johnson, "sentiment overlaps architecture and history...It gets too broad and every lady in tennis shoes feels everything should be

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<sup>190</sup> Beverly Tetterton, local history librarian and historian, interview by Carroll Jones, 28 August 2007, Oral History Collection, William Madison Randall Library, University of North Carolina at Wilmington.

protected.”<sup>191</sup> Likewise, Lowenthal suggests that “[we] benefit our successors less by encumbering them with a bundle of canonical artifacts and structures than by handing down memories.”<sup>192</sup> Johnson and Lowenthal’s observations may place preservationists on the defensive, but they also provide food for thought.

New questions arise. What should be preserved? What should be saved? For the preservationist, archivist, cultural anthropologist, and historian, there is a desire to save everything, because each object reveals telling information about who we are and how history unfolds. However, as Robert Murphrey mentioned in his speech to the Historic District Commission, Wilmington is a living city. Construction for the New Hanover County Courthouse, which DARE and the HWF worked to preserve and renovate, occurred only after supervising architect James E. Post had “old shanties” located on the property pulled down in 1891.<sup>193</sup> In this instance, progress came at the cost of destroying buildings which might have contained comparatively little historical significance. In contrast, the old U.S. post office, a large brownstone structure in the Richardsonian Romanesque style, was completed in 1891 and stood for 45 years before economic and employment woes stemming from the Great Depression dictated the construction of a new post office to supply laborers with work. (See figure 27) Construction of the building took place on the site of the old post office, ensuring the city of Wilmington would lose a structure containing architectural significance in order to revive a struggling economy. However, when the old post office was constructed in 1891, it was built on the site of a Greek Revival mansion, which in turn was moved, rather than demolished. According to Beverly Tetterton, compared to demolition, relocating buildings was the preferred

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<sup>191</sup> Tyler, *Historic Preservation*, 29-30.

<sup>192</sup> David Lowenthal, “The Heritage Crusade and Its Contradictions,” *Giving Preservation a History: Histories of Historic Preservation in the United States*, eds. Max Page and Randall Mason (New York: Routledge, 2004), 40;

<sup>193</sup> Wrenn, *An Architectural and Historical Portrait*, 74.

option used by the Historic Wilmington Foundation and recommended by the Historic District Commission.<sup>194</sup>

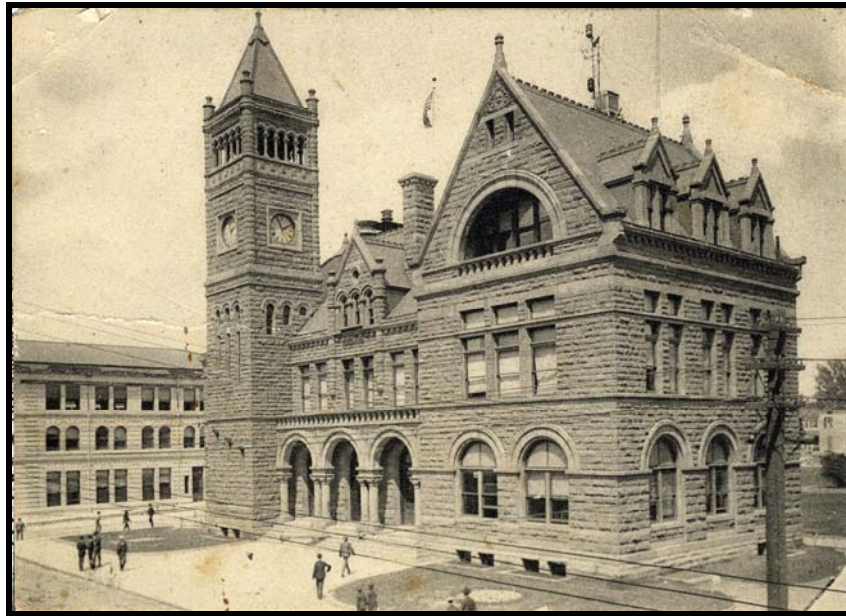


Figure 27. The demolition of the old post office in 1936 was symbolic of the struggle between economics and historic preservation. (Courtesy of New Hanover Public Library, Wilmington, N.C.)

In light of what occurred with both the courthouse and post office, it is evident that the politics of preservation and development is not a new topic for the city of Wilmington.

Furthermore, by simply reducing the matter to preservation and development, a detached stamp is placed on individuals who participate in humanistic endeavors which shape the manmade landscape. The heart of the matter lies with concepts such as survival and sentimentality.

Individuals, such as Lee Adler and Thomas H. Wright, Jr., who focused on urban husbandry, possess a sentimental attachment towards the landscape and the past, and wish to see it survive.

By contrast, urban planners and developers who wish to maximize the potential of a given region, forgo sentimentality and aim towards projects which bolster business and employment, if

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<sup>194</sup> Tetterton, *Lost But Not Forgotten*, 41-42; Tetterton, interview with the author, 29 October 2008.



at the cost of a region's architectural heritage. Perhaps the best example of widespread project planning occurred in the years between 1956 and roughly 1973, during urban renewal.

Consequently, the Wilmington's Committee of 100 was created for much the same reason that the Housing Act of 1956 was passed—namely, to bring life back to the city. Established in 1954 as a non-profit organization, the Committee of 100 looked to develop New Hanover County, focusing mainly on creating new industrial jobs. However the development aspects of the organization placed it in opposition with the HWF, which focused on preserving downtown Wilmington's architectural integrity. Enter DARE in 1977, which tried to balance between the two philosophies. According to Gareth Evans, assistant director of the HWF, “DARE was less into preservation as attracting business. I'm not sure it was ever in the preservation field, but they have certainly been bright enough to realize that the two go hand in hand in a downtown like Wilmington's.”<sup>195</sup>

By accomplishing its primary goals, DARE served much of its initial purpose, but in order to preserve itself, the organization began planning ambitious projects like CBD 2000, Riverfront Centre, and Vision 2020—a process which divided public opinion and led to numerous setbacks. Part of DARE's lack of success stemmed from the organization's shift from urban husbandry to project planning and the negative reactions of local organizations like the Residents of Old Wilmington and political figures like Harper Peterson. Rather than continuing with practices used by the HWF, DARE rejected incrementalism and the four-point policy which it initially preached.

Nicknamed the “Port City,” Wilmington adapted to shifting consumer trends and the constant flow of new technologies. Where once being nestled on a river served as a strategic advantage for downtown Wilmington, sprawl and the introduction of highways have fueled a

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<sup>195</sup> Gareth Evans, interview with the author, 17 July 2008.

sense of geographic competition. That is to say, regions which once served as an incentive for traveling to Wilmington in time became rivals. Though access to local beaches gave Wilmington the reputation of a resort town in the first half the twentieth century, easier access and quicker means of transportation to the beaches eventually allowed tourists to bypass the downtown area entirely. Dollars which once flowed into the cash registers of downtown businesses were lost as visitors and residents of New Hanover County deemed downtown Wilmington to be out of the way.

Unlike Charleston, Savannah, Denver, Chattanooga, and Mobile, downtown Wilmington's struggle for economic survival faced additional complications due to geographic issues. Competition from local beaches and shopping malls deter consumers and potential residents from either shopping or living in the downtown area. To compete and remain an economically viable city, DARE and city planners in downtown Wilmington worked to remain aware of their surroundings and adapt accordingly. However, measured growth, or smart growth is required to ensure that Wilmington preserves its architectural heritage. Unchecked development invites further sprawl and the possibility that buildings of historic significance—the structures which provided downtown with its very identity, would be lost. Should this happen, the city would defeat itself by destroying that which made it unique.

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